

The Prisoner

“Minister, our latest intelligence tells us that Voldemort is going after Azkaban. The reduction in dementors gives us an advantage, but not much. We aren’t sure what he hopes to accomplish in this attack, most of his supporters still there are insane. However, it is the Order’s recommendation that we transfer Prisoner number 8561 elsewhere. Even if the prisoner is insane Voldemort could, conceivably, use the connection between them to strengthen his own powers.” Twenty-five year old Ronald Weasley, official liaison between the Order of the Phoenix and the Ministry of Magic, looked carefully at Minister of Magic Amos Diggory.

The Minister thought for a moment and then signed the parchment Ron had brought, approving the transfer of Prisoner 8561, better known as Harry Potter, from Azkaban to the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix at Hogwarts.

Ron picked up the parchment and left the Ministry central building and apparated directly to the coast. From there, he used his Ministry ID to gain immediate passage to the fortress of Azkaban. As he rode the gentle waves of the Styx Sound, his memory drifted back ten years to the day when his best friend betrayed him.

“Come on Ron! I’m just tired of being stuck inside the castle. We can sneak down to the Three Broomsticks and have a butterbeer.” Harry begged one January evening of their fifth year.

Ron thought for a moment.

“Ron, I’m going stir crazy!” So was Ron when he thought about it. Because of the threat of Lord Voldemort all Hogsmeade visits had been canceled as well as all activities outside on the grounds. That meant no Quidditch for two years running. The articles in the Daily Prophet did nothing to help matters.

“Ok, Harry, let’s go,” Ron finally decided.

As the two approached the statue of the One-eyed witch Ron fleetingly wondered why Harry hadn’t asked Hermione. Then he

dismissed that thought realizing that Hermione, a Prefect now, would not allow them to go.

They emerged from Honeydukes and headed towards the Three Broomsticks. Ron's teeth were chattering and he was looking forward to the nice warm butterbeer.

As they passed an alleyway, Harry had suddenly lurched sideways and pushed Ron into the darkness. Scrambling up Ron looked at Harry, "You ok? Why did you fall?" Ron's eyes widened, "It wasn't your scar, was it?"

"No it wasn't." Harry said and glanced around at the alleyway.

Ron, confused, looked around also.

As soon as Ron was no longer looking at him, Harry pushed Ron backwards into the side of a building. Ron fell through the wall of the building and landed in a dusty basement. A moment later Harry came through the wall.

"Harry? What is going on here?" Ron was starting to get angry. He stood up and pulled his wand out.

"Expelliarmus!" Harry disarmed Ron.

"Well done, Potter." A voice from the shadows spoke, "You have proven your loyalty to our master!" Ron shivered as he recognized the voice of Lucius Malfoy.

With an unintelligible yell, Ron started towards the wall through which he had entered.

"Crucio!" Harry said and Ron collapsed in screams.

Suddenly other people entered through the wall.

It was Remus Lupin and Snuffles, followed by Hagrid and Arabella Figg.

Harry immediately released Ron from the Cruciatus Curse and turned to the others.

Lucius Malfoy and two other men who had not made their presence known before started firing curses at the newest arrivals. After a moment, Harry joined them. He shot a curse at Sirius and then made a dash for the wall.

Hagrid, shocked and angry, moved to intercept the boy.

“Avada Kedavra!” Harry shouted and ended the life of the gentle giant. Then he disappeared through the wall.

Arabella Figg followed with a grim, determined, look on her face.

Ron, tears streaming down his face by this time fired off a Stunner at Lucius Malfoy and the fell unconscious himself.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself in the Infirmary. He heard voices and turned toward their source. He saw the Headmaster and Remus Lupin talking quietly beside the bed of Sirius Black.

“Headmaster?” Ron called softly.

Albus Dumbledore turned and walked quickly over to him.

“Mr. Weasley, how are you feeling?”

“I’m fine. What happened? Who was impersonating Harry? Why were they after me?”

Albus Dumbledore closed his eyes, “Ron, it wasn’t anybody impersonating Harry. That was Harry.”

“What! It can’t be! Harry would never, he...” Ron trailed off at the defeated look on Dumbledore’s face.

“Remus saw the two of you leave. He happened to be looking at the Marauder’s Map. You know that Map doesn’t lie. Arabella went after

Harry. She didn't catch him, but he dropped his wand on the way. If the owner of a wand is missing, you can locate them by using their own wand if they have touched it in the past twenty-four hours. We found Harry near the edge of the Forbidden Forest. He has been charged with using the Cruciatus Curse, collusion with known criminal offenders and murdering Rubeus Hagrid."

Ron lay there stunned in his bed. He couldn't believe it. He turned away from the headmaster, pulling the blanket over his head, wishing he had never regained consciousness.

The boat, known as The Charon to most, bumped the pier gently, startling Ron out of his dismal memory. Shaking himself, he instructed the boatman to wait for him and the prisoner. Walking past the two security checkpoints, he then entered Azkaban proper. A wave of cold settled over him, reminding him of the presence of the dementors. Although the Minister had removed the majority of the creatures a number of years earlier, for fear of them joining Voldemort, there were still fifty who were bound to the Fortress.

From all reports, the reduction in number of dementors had not reduced the number of inmates who went insane. Ron set his mouth in a grim line as he approached the cell of his one-time best friend. The dementors, though in another part of the structure at the moment, still affected Ron as they evoked the memory of the trial.

Ron himself had testified, as had Remus Lupin and Arabella Figg. They had used *Priori Incantatem* to prove that it was, indeed, Harry's wand that killed Rubeus Hagrid.

In the end, there had been no doubt that the Boy-Who-Lived had turned from the light and joined Voldemort.

Yet, Harry still sat there, pleading, proclaiming innocence. The judge hit him with a silencing spell. Because Harry was a minor, they could not sentence him to the Dementor's Kiss. Instead, he got two life sentences in Azkaban.

As two dementors escorted a fainting Harry from the courtroom Ron shed one last tear and then resolved to do everything he could to destroy the darkness that had claimed his friend.

Standing in front of the cell, he looked at Harry Potter for the first time in ten years.

The man was painfully thin. His ribs were outlined with the thin prison issue garments. His hair was limp, no longer the wild mess it had been. His famous scar was not visible under the tangled mass of bangs that lay on his forehead. A pair of glasses, missing one earpiece, was clutched in a bony white hand. His eyes were closed and he was sleeping. Every so often, a shudder would run through his body.

Ron muttered the password to unlock the cell and stepped inside. The occupant jumped awake at the screech of metal.

“Prisoner 8561 you are to be transferred to the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix. Any resistance on your part will be met with harsh consequences. Stand up and face the wall.”

Harry Potter, after putting on his glasses, did as instructed, face showing no emotion for or recognition of the man standing in his cell.

Ron conjured manacles for his hands and then, taking him by an elbow, escorted the man to another part of the fortress. He left him in a room and locked the door.

“I am transferring Prisoner 8561 to Hogwarts by order of the Minister of Magic. I request all prison records concerning this man.” Ron said, producing the Minister’s instructions for the man who sat in the Processing room.

“All of this seems to be in order, Mr. Weasley. Please wait one moment while I retrieve the records.

Ron sat and waited, contemplating what kind of person would take a job at Azkaban. He knew that the workers were on two-week

rotations. They would work for two weeks and then get six weeks off the island. It must have been the most miserable job on the planet.

When the man returned Ron thanked him, took the file on Harry, and exited. He shrunk the file, put it in a pocket, and returned to Harry.

He took him past the two security checkpoints, where he had to show the Minister's instructions each time, and returned to the boat.

Following Ministry procedure, he then chained Harry to the seat in the boat (prisoners had been known to attempt to drown themselves during transport). When they reached the mainland Ron took Harry to the Land-Side Processing Station for the final checkout and stamp for a Prison Transfer.

When all the paper work had been completed, he took out the portkey Dumbledore had given him, took hold of Harry, and activated it.

They arrived at the front entrance of Hogwarts. Unable, to compensate with his hands, Harry had fallen to the ground. Ron, wand on Harry, levitated him back into a standing position.

“Thank you, Mr. Weasley.” Sirius Black’s voice came through the now open door. “If you will bring the prisoner with you, I will lead you to his cell.”

Ron and Harry followed Sirius Black through the halls and down stairs to one of the lower dungeons where there was a secure cell.

After closing the door, they removed the manacles from Harry’s hands and left him alone, with one person to guard the hallway.

Ron and Sirius then walked to the Headmaster’s office to report.

“Albus, the Prisoner transfer was successful.” Ron said.

“And how was the prisoner’s behavior?” Albus asked. Ron knew that he was really asking if he was insane.

Retrieving the folder from his pocket and enlarging it Ron handed it to him, "Here is the prison record on him.

"Thank you Ron. You may go now." Ron left.

Albus and Sirius then proceeded to review the prison record.

Prisoner ID: 8561

Prisoner Name: Harry James Potter

Sentence: Two Life terms

Current Age: 16

Date of record entry: 17 November 1996

Physical Condition: The prisoner is underweight.

Mental Condition: Unknown. The prisoner has not made a sound since entering the prison. He seems to be rational, but at times he spasms and holds his head.

Other Comments: None.

The record of each year following said pretty much the same thing. Albus and Sirius could come to no conclusion about his sanity.

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Albus sighed heavily. He rubbed his face as he tried to figure out what the Dark Lord's next move would be. His spies only knew that it was something big. Whether it was an attack on Hogwarts, the Ministry, or something else they didn't know. All were equally likely.

There was a knock on his door. "Come in," he called, grateful for the distraction. The door opened to reveal a young woman who looked slightly troubled.

"Yes, Auror Moon?"

“Well, sir, you wished to be notified of any changes in the prisoner’s behavior. He’s...well, he’s talking, and insisting on speaking to you.”

Albus’ eyebrows drew together in confusion. Harry Potter had not spoken a word since he had been brought to Hogwarts. To Albus’ knowledge, he had barely spoken at all for the past decade. Slowly he stood up, his muscles and bones protesting so much Albus was sure the young woman could hear them.

“I shall see what the prisoner wants.”

As he walked down to the cell where Harry Potter was being kept, his mind was still pondering the latest intelligence and trying to make sense of it. Approaching the prisoner he heard a scratchy voice say, “I will stop him this time!”

“Mr. Potter, you wished to say something.”

Harry jumped, startled, as the door opened and Albus entered. The door closed behind him and the Auror remained watching everything.

Without preamble Harry said, “Diagon Alley. His next target. A week from tomorrow in broad daylight with approximately 300 supporters.”

Albus Dumbledore regarded Harry carefully.

“And how do you know this? Not even my best spies know what his target will be.”

“They don’t attend every single meeting between Voldemort and one or more of his Death Eaters. The only ones who know the full plans are Wormtail, Lucius Malfoy and Marcus Flint.”

“And how do you know?”

Harry gave a dry, humorless laugh, “Azkaban couldn’t dim the connection; if anything, the dementors intensified the effects. If you hadn’t thrown me there I would have been your greatest information

source. In the past ten years I have heard every detail of every attack being planned out weeks or even months before they happened.”

“Are you telling me this, hoping for mercy Mr. Potter? We must reap what we sow.” Albus’ voice contained no anger as he had long since decided it was futile to become angry at Harry’s choices.

Harry gazed at him, “I am hoping for mercy, but not in the way you are thinking. Any life that can be saved by giving you this information means one fewer death that I feel, one less Cruciatus curse that I must endure. That is all the mercy I am expecting. For the past ten years I have been reaping in abundance that which I did not sow.” With that, Harry lay down on the bed and turned away from Albus.

Albus left the cell, contemplating what he had been told.

He called an Order meeting immediately after returning from Harry’s cell. As the members all filed in he sighed, wondering how best to tell them his information came from their infamous prisoner.

“Thank you for responding so quickly to my summons. I have new information regarding Voldemort’s next target. He plans to attack Diagon Alley next Thursday around noon. My source says he will have about 300 supporters. Now that we have this information, we must work quickly to avert a disaster.”

There were murmurings from the assembled crowd. Someone spoke up, “How did you come by this information, Albus? None of our covert ops have turned up this much detail. Is the source reliable?”

Albus sighed, “I don’t know how reliable the source is. Because of certain circumstances, my source has only recently been able to pass information on to me. I have no doubt my source knows exactly what is going on; how much of what is conveyed to me is the truth? I only have my instincts. Other things my source said lead me to believe this information is the truth.”

After a few minutes, the group as a whole decided to act on this intelligence and prevent a disaster.

As the Order of the Phoenix dispersed the leading members, Arthur Weasley, Sirius Black, Mafalda Hopkirk, Ryan Zambini, and Minerva McGonagall, Severus Snape, and Ron Weasley lingered waiting to speak with Dumbledore.

They entered a smaller meeting room and they all sat down.

Severus started without preamble, “Who is this new spy who has information on the most inner workings of Voldemort?”

Albus Dumbledore sighed, “You’re not going to like this. There was a reason I didn’t just announce it to the whole assembly, and it wasn’t to protect the spy.”

Everyone tensed, this didn’t sound good. “Well?” asked Minerva, after a few moments of silence.

“I want you to think about this objectively, do not let your judgment be clouded. I believe my source is telling the truth and if this latest information is the truth I think we can rely more heavily on this informant.”

“Who?” asked Mafalda impatiently.

“Our prisoner downstairs told me Voldemort’s latest plans.”

There was absolute silence.

Sirius’ face darkened. He spoke in a low voice, “And you have decided to trust the word of this traitor? How do we know this is not a trap that he is sending us into.”

Albus sighed; he had known that this would be Sirius’s reaction.

“I have thought of that possibility. I do not believe those are his intentions. He is telling us the truth in an effort to help us.”

“No Death Eater has ever willingly given information without asking anything in return,” cut in Ryan Zambini, “Whether it is lenience in

sentencing or only after a dose of Veritaserum, they never give information completely willingly.”

“Ryan, I am well aware of this,” Dumbledore put in mildly, “I took this into account and addressed this fact. Mr. Potter is, in fact, getting something in return if we are successful.”

Minerva gave the headmaster a confused look and asked what he meant by that.

“If we are successful then Mr. Potter will not be made to witness the innocents dying, feel their torture, or watch the destruction.”

Understanding dawned on Arthur Weasley’s face first. “His scar still connects him to Lord Voldemort? He has lived in Azkaban for the past ten years, watching every attack?”

“Not only watching every attack, but seeing the plans being drawn up months in advance, and not being able to do anything with that knowledge.”

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Severus Snape cursed himself in his head. He didn’t dare do it aloud. That monitoring spell the Dark Lord had put on him allowed Voldemort to see and hear everything he could see and hear. The battle was at the castle gates now and Dumbledore was commanding all who were able to strengthen the wards. Voldemort had not yet joined the fight. Instead, he sent Severus into the castle, with a monitoring spell on him, to get Potter. If Severus betrayed him, he would kill him instantly through the monitoring spell.

Severus had pondered what to do. Should he betray his position in order to keep Potter out of Voldemort’s clutches? No, Voldemort would get Potter anyway and then Severus’ death would have been unnecessary. Severus knew that he still had work to do in the fight ahead. So he clung to the almost dead hope that Potter would refuse the offer. Then he scoffed at himself. Of course Potter wouldn’t refuse the offer.

Arriving at the cell, he opened it and called out, "Prisoner, you are offered a choice. Stay here and rot, waiting for the castle to crumble, or come with me and rejoin the Dark Lord. Will you rejoin Voldemort?"

Potter looked at Severus and Severus felt a chill run through his body at the face on the man. It was the face a walking dead man.

Slowly the head nodded and Potter stood up, ready to follow. Severus was now yelling out every curse he knew in his head.

"Very well, Potter, follow me."

Snape didn't even bother to put any type of restraint on him. Where would he go alone? What would he do? His intent was to rejoin his master, so what would he gain by not following Severus?

Silently, Potter walked after his old Potions Professor.

As they approached the gates, Severus' heart plummeted as he saw the tide of the battle turning against Dumbledore's allies. Voldemort had erected a dome security spell, which enclosed himself, Dumbledore and two Death Eaters who were holding onto the old man. Albus was struggling to retrieve something but the barrier prevented it. Snape realized with a start that he was trying to reach his wand.

Voldemort knew they were approaching and he created an opening for Severus and Harry to enter into.

"Severus, a job well done. I am pleasantly surprised. Now leave the circle."

Snape, seeing no other alternative, left. He watched in morbid fascination as the circle closed, sealing him off from his mentor.

He couldn't hear what was going on, but he, and everybody else on the field, was watching intently. Death Eater and Order members stood side by side, all fighting forgotten, waiting to see what would happen.

Voldemort seemed to be saying something to Dumbledore. Albus' eyes widened as he replied. Voldemort laughed and said something else. Albus glanced at Harry and closed his eyes, hanging his head in defeat. Voldemort laughed some more and turned to ask Harry a question. Harry slowly nodded his head. Then he opened his mouth and said something. Severus could see Albus shudder and wondered what was happening. Voldemort pulled out his wand and waved it.

"Here you are Potter!" everyone could now hear what was going on, though the security dome remained intact. Voldemort handed his wand to Potter.

"Now, kill the man who betrayed you!" Voldemort said. Severus could hear the anticipation in his voice. Snape's breath caught in his throat as he saw Potter take the wand and turn to the venerable old wizard.

"Let him go and step out of the circle," Harry's voice was rough and scratchy from disuse. The two Death Eaters looked to Voldemort and he nodded. A slight part in one of the sides of the dome and the two men were out.

"Say your last words, Albus Dumbledore!" Voldemort said, almost gleefully. Dumbledore lifted his head defiantly, but said nothing.

Harry pointed the wand at Dumbledore and shouted "Avada Kedavra!"

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Albus Dumbledore stood between two Death Eaters, struggling to retrieve his wand. Voldemort laughed at his attempts. After a few minutes, the Dark Lord turned to see two figures approaching. When they were closer, Albus could see that they were Severus and Harry.

"Ah, here they come. I think it a delicious irony, don't you Albus? That you will be killed by your Golden Boy. The one you thought would defeat me!"

Severus and Harry entered into the circle. Voldemort commanded Severus to leave.

“Now Albus, before you die. Let me tell you something. Harry Potter did not murder Rubeus Hagrid, nor did he ever use an Unforgivable. He is innocent as he claimed.”

Albus stared wide-eyed at Voldemort, “But the map...” he mumbled, confused.

Voldemort laughed, “And who helped make the map, but my faithful servant Wormtail? It worked perfectly! A spell on his own creation and a bit of Polyjuice Potion and you all fell for it!”

Albus looked at Harry, at the man he had become after spending ten years in Azkaban. Remorse that he had never known welled up inside him as he realized what he had done.

He had condemned an innocent fifteen year old to the hell known as Azkaban. As he recalled the words Harry had said “For ten years I have reaped in abundance that which I did not sow,” he realized that what Harry felt in Azkaban was ten times worse than what Sirius Black had endured. The boy’s connection with Voldemort had provided new horrors, probably nightly. In the face of what he had done, Albus hung his head in defeat.

Voldemort laughed again.

“Harry Potter, would you do me the honor of killing the great Albus Dumbledore!”

Albus heard no direct reply, but the a scratchy voice said, “I wish all to hear what is happening and I will need a wand.”

Albus shuddered at the coldness in the tone and the thought of his impending death.

Voldemort voiced a spell that Albus knew would allow those outside of the security spell to hear what was going on.

“Here you are Potter!” Albus, eyes still down, assumed that Voldemort had handed Harry his wand.

“Now, kill the man who betrayed you!” Voldemort shouted.

There was a pause and then Albus heard Harry’s voice again, “Let him go and step out of the circle.” After a moment the two Death Eater’s holding onto him let go. A small humming sound accompanied their departure through the security spell.

“Say your last words, Albus Dumbledore!” Voldemort cackled.

Dumbledore lifted his head and looked at Harry. He refused to die looking at his feet.

Harry lifted the wand and shouted “Avada Kedavra!”

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Complete pandemonium broke out. Severus stared in shock at Potter. He had missed! Snape knew it couldn’t have been an accident. Potter had purposely aimed the killing curse so that it would not hit Dumbledore, but instead hit the dome itself.

Any spell done to the dome from the inside automatically rebounded onto the one who the dome was tied to, in this case, Voldemort. The Dark Lord screeched in rage as he realized what Potter had done. He attempted to dodge the green light that was reflected back towards him, but it was futile. The Killing Curse struck Voldemort full in the chest. It didn’t kill him, but it weakened him considerably. The dome flickered as well.

Potter reached in his pocket, pulled out a wand, and threw it to the astonished Headmaster of Hogwarts. Snape realized with a start that it was his wand. How had Potter gotten hold of it?

“Together!” Potter said.

Without hesitation, Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore pointed their borrowed wands at the Dark Lord and shouted in unison, “Avada Kedavra!”

This time Voldemort did not survive.

Even before the dome had completely vanished in the wake of its anchor’s death, the Order members had reacted and stunned every Death Eater they could see. A few fought, a few ran, but all of them were stunned shortly.

Snape watched as Dumbledore picked up his own wand and started a complex incantation over the body of the Dark Lord. When he had finished, Harry Potter stepped forward and muttered a charm. He then dropped the wand of the Dark Lord onto the body. They were both immediately engulfed in flame.

While Order members gathered the stunned Death Eaters, Severus approached Dumbledore. The headmaster handed his wand back.

“Albus? What happened?”

“Harry is innocent. He was framed, Severus. We sent an innocent child to Azkaban.” The headmaster said in a deeply pained and remorseful voice.

Severus’ eyebrows snapped upwards. He quickly looked around and saw Potter walking slowly across the grounds.

“Severus, please follow him. Do not disturb him, but do not let him out of your sight. Let no one harm him.”

Severus nodded and set off after him. Dumbledore summoned all of the ranking Order members and whatever Ministry workers had arrived.

They quickly congregated in the hallway.

“Headmaster, what happened?” demanded Oliver Wood, an Auror with the Ministry.

“Why did Potter do that?”

“Why did you let him walk off?”

Questions came from all sides. Dumbledore raised his hand for quiet.

“What you did not hear while I was in the circle, was Voldemort’s admission that he framed Harry Potter for those crimes. Harry Potter is an innocent man.”

There was a general silence.

Ron Weasley’s mouth hung open in utter amazement.

“But, Albus, the Map...” Remus spluttered.

Albus closed his eyes as though in pain, “Remus, who made the map? Who knows every spell that went into it? You, Sirius, and Peter. Who could have altered it? You, Sirius, and Peter. Who impersonated him and altered the map? Peter.”

Sirius Black gasped in horror and stumbled. Someone caught him, but he couldn’t tell who it was. He moaned in agony as he remembered his own stay in Azkaban and realized that his Godson had no animagus transformation to shield himself with.

Remus stared in shock and slowly, silently, sank down to the floor. He sat there, unable to speak.

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Sirius sat staring into the fire. However, he didn’t notice the warmth the cheerfully flickering flames gave off, nor did he realize that the rest of the room was dark and that he was too far away from the fire to feel its heat.

A door opened somewhere behind him. The rest of the room lit up.

“Sirius?” a woman’s voice called.

He made no answer; indeed, there was no indication he heard her.

She walked across the room to stand in front of him, “Sirius? Are you okay?” she asked, seeing his vacant stare.

There was no response.

Arabella Figg-Black bit her lip; the last time she had seen Sirius this bad was when his Godson was put in Azkaban. She couldn’t imagine what had happened now. She tentatively reached out and touched his hand. It was cold as ice. She sucked in her breath sharply. Standing back, she used her wand to move the couch he was sitting on closer to the fire. Then she found a blanket and placed it over him.

She moved into the kitchens area, took out a few ingredients, and returned a few minutes later to Sirius, with a cup in hand. She placed it directly under his nose.

As he inhaled the scent, his hand automatically grasped the handle and he started to drink. However, Sirius still seemed to be oblivious to her presence. A trill of fear ran through her. What had happened to make him react like this? She had not gotten any details of the battle. She had finally been released from the infirmary and had immediately returned to the chambers she and her husband shared.

Now she wondered what had happened in the battle. She gently took the cup from his hand and set it on the table. Then she slapped him across the face.

He blinked and focused on her.

“Ari?”

“Sirius, what happened,” her voice was distressed.

Sirius closed his eyes and started shaking. Then he started crying. Then it grew to a bawl and then to a howl.

Arabella gaped at her husband. In the more than thirty-five years they had known each other, she had never ever seen Sirius Black cry. He had not cried when his parents had been killed in his sixth year; he had not cried when James and Lily had died; he had not cried when the ministry had declared him innocent; he had not cried when Harry betrayed them all.

There was a small knock on the door and then it opened without an invitation. Arabella glanced around and then jumped up with a gasp, clutching her wand in her hand.

“You!”

Sirius somehow heard the hatred in her voice through his wails and turned to see who had entered. Immediately he was silent.

Harry ignored Arabella and looked steadily at Sirius. “You wanted to see me, Mr. Black?”

“Harry, Harry, Harry,” Sirius started babbling, scaring his wife even more.

Resolutely she took a step closer to Harry Potter and said, “I don’t know how you got out of your cell, but would you please leave. Haven’t you caused enough pain for this man?”

Harry turned and regarded her with ice-cold eyes. She shivered. Suddenly he pulled out a wand and with only the slightest flick of his wrist, and no words, he disarmed Arabella. Catching her wand, he pocketed it immediately. Arabella paled, thinking of the night she had seen this boy murder Rubeus Hagrid. He moved closer to her, she stiffened. When he was mere inches from her he moved his wand, Arabella closed her eyes. Then...he was past her. She looked at him and saw that he had only been putting his wand back in his pocket.

How did he get a wand anyway?

She watched as he stood menacingly in front of her husband. He crossed his arms. “Well? What did you want to say?”

Tears started running down Sirius' cheeks again, "Please Harry, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I failed you. I betrayed you. Oh Merlin, I have never been more sorry for anything in my life. When I think how much I hurt you, oh Harry, I don't even know what to say to you. I misjudged you and I can never forgive myself for that. I know you probably won't ever forgive me either. But I needed to say I was sorry Harry. More sorry about this than anything I have ever been sorry about."

"More sorry than switching secret keepers?" Harry said without emotion.

"Yes," Sirius answered without hesitation, "I failed you, I betrayed you, I misjudged you, and I made the biggest mistake of my life."

"Misjudged me. Yes, you misjudged me, you all did," emotion crept into Harry's face for the first time, and it was pure pain, "Do you have any idea how many lives were lost as a result of that misjudgment?"

Sirius looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"I saw and heard every detail of every attack weeks before they happened, and I could do nothing. I saw those plans unfold. I saw those people die. Do you know how much it hurt to have that prior knowledge and not be able to do anything? Do you know how close I was to going insane and killing myself? Do you have any idea how much torment I went through? I felt every Cruciatus Curse Voldemort cast this past decade. Then there were the dementors. They brought every pain, every death, and every scream to the forefront of reality. I relived every single Killing Curse and Cruciatus Curse a thousand times.

"You may have been in Azkaban for twelve years Sirius, but you can't imagine what I went through. I kept my sanity because I wanted revenge for all the pain. That is what kept me alive."

With that, Harry Potter left the room. Arabella, still not sure what had just happened. She looked at her husband, who was rocking back and forth on the couch, clasping and unclasping his hands and whimpering.

Arabella made a cup of tea, put a calming potion in it, and gave it to her husband.

He drank and slowly unfolded from his curled up position.

“Sirius,” Arabella said gently but firmly, “can you tell me what happened?”

“Ari, Ari, I am a failure.”

“Sirius, please talk to me so I can understand!” she begged him.

“He’s innocent Ari. He was framed, just as I was. By the same person. We threw an innocent child into Azkaban. I was an adult, I was almost twenty-two, but he was only fifteen. He was the most innocent of innocents Ari, and we all betrayed him! Harry never harmed anybody in his life. He didn’t have a malicious or mean bone in his body. And what did we do? We damned him to hell.

“Ari, I don’t know if I can live with myself. I just want to die. I have failed. I failed Harry and James and Lily, utterly and completely.”

Arabella was staring in horror. Harry Potter had been innocent all along? How was it possible?

“I knew him, Ari. Even if I didn’t believe his statements, I should have at least pressed for Veritaserum in the trial. I owed him that much! I can never repay him Ari. None of us can. I would let him murder me if I thought it would undo what I did to him.” Sirius was crying again.

“What do you mean, none of us can repay him?” Arabella asked shakily.

Sirius took another few gulps of the potion-laced tea. It seemed to be working because the hysterical note had gone out of his voice as he explained what had happened in the battle.

“In the battle, he...he.... Voldemort had Snape go and offer Harry freedom if he would join Voldemort. Harry accepted and came out.

Things were looking grim by that time. Voldemort had Albus, wandless, in a security dome. He could have killed him. But Voldemort loved the irony of it being Harry who would defeat the Light. Nobody else heard, but in the circle, Voldemort told Albus that Harry was innocent. Then Voldemort gave Harry his wand and offered for him to kill Albus. It was hopeless; none of us could do anything to help Albus. He, himself, gave up. He knew what he had done to Harry and he gave up. Have you ever known Albus Dumbledore to give up?

“Harry pointed Voldemort’s wand at Albus and used the killing curse, but he purposely aimed wrong. It hit the dome and reflected back onto Voldemort. Then he handed Albus a wand and they both shot the killing curse again. Voldemort died. Albus did a spell to make sure his spirit did not escape as it had before and then Harry burned both the wand and the body.

“Voldemort is gone Ari, and we owe it solely to the one we betrayed.” Sirius put his head down and moaned in agony.

~~\*\*\*\*~~

The Minister of Magic came to Hogwarts as soon as was possible.

“Albus,” Diggory said catching his breath, “the things I’ve heard! Tell me what has happened.”

Albus sighed and indicated for Amos to take a chair, “Voldemort is defeated, once and for all. We owe it completely to Harry Potter.”

“Potter?” exclaimed the Minister, in disbelief, “That traitor?”

The Headmaster shook his head, “He is not the traitor. We betrayed him. Voldemort framed Harry for those crimes. He admitted it openly and we have a full confession from the actual perpetrator. Harry Potter is innocent.”

Amos Diggory was stunned. This turn of events was unprecedented in his mind. He gathered his thoughts together and decided to sort through his emotions later; there was business to be done now.

“In light of that, we will need an official pardon, and compensation for him. We must meet with him in order to meet his demands.” Amos said.

Albus nodded, “The sooner the better.”

~~\*\*\*\*~~

The next afternoon four people sat in the Headmaster’s office to determine the future of Harry Potter.

Amos, Albus and Sirius all apologized profusely to Harry, but as soon as they saw those apologies were not being received they desisted.

“Mr. Potter, you are granted a full pardon from the Ministry of Magic and an official apology,” Amos stated formally, “your money has been deposited into your Gringots account, as well as remuneration for your false imprisonment. All holds on your personal items have been released and they should be returned to you by tonight. You have your wand and we grant you full Wizard privileges. Is there anything else you want?”

Harry sat uncomfortably in the chair, his Godfather to this left and Albus Dumbledore to the right. He said nothing.

There was a sigh and Albus spoke up, “Harry, you can’t imagine how sorry we are. What do you want us to do?”

Harry turned to stare at the old man. Then he stood up, retracted a piece of paper from a pocket, and handed it to the Minister of Magic.

“I want all of my money exchanged for Muggle money, no percentage taken out for the cost of exchange, and put into a bank account under my name at the Bank of Britain. Then I want a Wizard’s oath that neither you,” he addressed Albus, “nor your school will ever enter into my life again, that neither you,” he turned to Amos, “nor the Ministry of Magic will ever enter my life again, and that you,” he turned to Sirius, “will never come near me again.”

Silence reigned in the office as the implications of that sunk in.

Harry was leaving the world that had betrayed him.

Three days later, a letter arrived at the Daily Prophet.

To Whom it May Concern,

I am Harry Potter, the wizard you betrayed.

You don't think it was betrayal? It was. You hung every hope on me, called me your hero, put me up on a pedestal, and then, on nothing more than flimsy circumstantial evidence, condemned me to Hell on earth.

That is what Azkaban is you know. You forced me, every day for ten years, to relive the deaths of my parents, to see Voldemort rise again, to see Cedric murdered again, to relive every pain I have ever felt.

How dare you say you love me and then throw me away like that!

I killed Voldemort, but I didn't do it for you, I did it for myself, revenge on the man that has ruined my life at every turn.

You played right into his hands, you know. You foolishly and unwittingly became his allies. It wasn't enough for you that I had fought against everything he stood for, ever since I entered your world. You just assumed, even knowing that people have been framed before, that I had joined the one man whom I wish had never been born.

I say this once and I don't intend to say it again. I never want to see or hear from anyone in the Wizarding world ever again. If so much as one person comes up to me or owls me and says anything about the Wizarding world, you will be sorry. You have been warned.

Harry Potter

The day his letter appeared in the Daily Prophet Harry Potter Apparated away from Hogsmeade, severing all ties to the wizarding

world. He went to his bank in London and closed his account, withdrawing more than fifteen million pounds. The next day Harry Potter disappeared.

## A New Life

David Barnes walked up to the college administration building and followed the signs advertising night classes. He greeted the receptionist, "I'd like to sign up to take night classes." He said. Ten minutes later he exited the building as a registered student, tuition fully paid. He'd registered to take refresher courses and GCSE and A-Level prep courses.\*

Then he went and got a new drivers license and bought a car. He spent the rest of the day driving around looking for an apartment and a job. He knew he could live off his bank account, but he really didn't want to have too much time on his hands because he knew he would just dwell on the past.

The second day of searching yielded an apartment that was an easy commute to the night school building and to a number of businesses. He applied for jobs at a number of businesses, but most wanted people with degrees. He finally found a menial labor in an assembly line job at a plant that made drills called Grunnings. He absolutely hated it, but it was a job that kept him busy. He was promoted to floor supervisor within two months. Then he was promoted to a desk job after six months.

It took a year for him to get enough schooling under his belt to take his A-Levels. By that time, he was an assistant vice president to the company. He quit, amid protests from a number of people and started going to University full time. He graduated in three years, then he went to medical school.

David had started dating a woman named Kathryn Taylor (who had taught one of his night classes) while he was in his second year at the university. They married when he started medical school. Kathryn's parents were worried about him being able to support their daughter while he was going to school full time. They, Kathryn included, were ever so surprised when he revealed how wealthy he was from an inheritance he had received. They bought a house first thing (paid in full) and settled in to married life.

His colleagues at the medical school found David not to be the typical struggling medical student. He seemed self assured and never had to cut down on classes to work through school-consequently he could take classes year round and compacted his schooling. He was married and had a house. In his second year of medical school his first daughter was born.

They named her Courtney Samantha Barnes. She had blue eyes and red hair, blue eyes from her mother and red hair from grandmothers on both sides. The year he completed medical school Kathryn gave birth to their second child a boy with black hair and green eyes (Kathryn couldn't figure out where those genes came from). David delivered him himself because they couldn't reach the hospital in time. They named him Michael Wayne Barnes.

\*Thank you to reviewer She-who-shall-not-be-named for explaining the British education system to me somewhat. I'm still not sure how the adult education system works (are there even drop-outs in Britain and can they start back school later? I don't even know) but at least now I know the name of the tests.

A/N continued: If you haven't already guessed it, yes David is Harry (why else would I be writing about him?) So here is a timeline for both me and you to keep the dates straight.

2005-Harry 25, leaves wizarding world

2005-2006- becomes David Barnes, night school, works at Grunnings

2006-2009- university

2009-starts medical school, marries Kathryn

2009-2016- medical school (is seven years long enough? Well it is in this story.)

2010-Courtney born

2016-Michael born

2021-where we rejoin story in chapter four (chapter three will pretty much be to introduce Kathryn to you and see Harry/David as everyone else sees him now). 18 years have passed-Harry/David is almost 41 years old, Kathryn is 39, Courtney is eleven (see where Harry is going to be forced to face the wizarding world again?) and Michael is five.

Oh and about him working for Grunnings- I thought it would be amusing and I might someday write more about the experience of working along side Vernon, but certainly not any time soon. Hmm I think I should have Harry buy the entire company of Grunnings....

Again, thank you so much for your support and enthusiastic reviews!

## Getting to know you

He always sat in the front of the class. He slouched in his chair somewhat; I guess he felt self-conscious because he was tall. No, not tall, but he was so thin that he seemed taller than he actually was. He had brown hair that was cut short and well kempt. He had brown eyes and sometimes showed up with a pair of wire-rimmed glasses on his nose, and other times he had contacts in.

He never socialized with the others in the A-Level prep class. He introduced himself as David Barnes and didn't really say anything else. To my knowledge, he had no friends. He was a complete loner, always on the outside.

I know several times he was invited to social functions that the other adults planned, but he turned them all down.

One day I happened to get there early and I found him sitting on a couch in the lobby area of the building. He was just reading the text. I greeted him and he just grunted in return. He was cold to everyone. I asked around and people said they didn't know much about him. He rarely answered questions and never spoke voluntarily.

Somewhere along the way, I became obsessed with him. Not because I liked him at that point, but because I couldn't understand how someone could survive completely isolated from society. I guess I'm a people person.

The first conversation we held took place a month before the course I taught ended. I found him sitting in the lobby once more, just studying. I just started talking about anything that came to mind. I think he just finally started talking because he was so annoyed. To my surprise, he wasn't rude, or, rather, he didn't insult me or tell me to go away and shut up, as I expected he would.

At first, he just ignored me hoping I would go away. Finally he got a clue that I wasn't going anywhere and he responded to something I was saying-which actually surprised me enough for me to stop talking for a little bit. I saw him smirk at this and so I started talking again.

I really don't remember all I said, but I do remember when he finally just sighed and set his book down and turned his attention to me. That was when he really started participating in the conversation. He was still quiet. I had to take the lead in the conversation, and he still didn't volunteer any information without a question to illicit it, but he answered in more than monosyllables.

I don't know where I found the courage, but I eventually I just asked him, "Why do you isolate yourself? Don't you have any friends?"

He stiffened and his eyes got so cold that I thought he was just going to get up leave, "I'm sorry," I said, "I shouldn't have asked that."

He looked at me, though it felt more like he was looking through me, and then relaxed again as I changed the subject. "So what are you planning on doing when you get out of this course?"

"I'm going to go to University."

"What will you be studying?"

He was silent for a little while and then answered, "I'm not sure yet. I don't even know what I like, it has been so long since I've had any schooling."

"Why is that?"

He sighed, "Just...I dropped out of school as a teenager...it wasn't a happy time. I finally got some sense and decided to go back to school."

This quiet man had been a rebellious teenager? I couldn't see it at all.

"Well, do you have a job now?"

"Yes, I work for a Drill Company called Grunnings."

Our conversation went on until class was to start. It was the first of many. He seemed to have resigned himself to the fate that I wanted

to talk to him. I suppose he found some joy in these conversations because he kept coming early, even though he knew I would be there.

The class ended few days before the adults were to take their A-Levels. That day I got there especially early, hoping to talk to David longer. He came in five minutes after I got there. I had gotten pretty good at reading his emotions over the past month. I could tell he was slightly surprised and pleased, though I doubted anyone of his classmates would have been able to tell.

“Kathryn, you’re early.”

“I know, this is the last class you’ll have with me, but I hope we can still be friends.” I said, thinking to myself how corny that had sounded.

He sat down and looked at his hands for a moment, “I quit work today, so I can concentrate on University full time after I take the tests next week,” a small smile crossed his face as he continued, “One of my co-workers was upset at me quitting-for some reason he likes me better because I hardly ever talk; I just get the work done and he likes that. Detestable man actually, he just liked me because he could take credit for my work. He got mad at me today because I quit and he can’t use me anymore. I was angry and so I went out and bought up a bunch of shares in the company-if I keep up the same rate I will own enough of the company to get him fired.”

I had no clue why he was telling me this, but I was pleased that he was volunteering information for the first time.

“I want to continue our friendship Kathryn. I realized that when I left Grunnings today and wanted to tell someone about it.”

I smiled, relieved, “Thank you David, I would hate to see you become like you were when I first saw you.”

True to his word, we remained friends. Our relationship was not romantic in any way for the longest time. We had a completely platonic friendship. I even complained to him about the guys I dated, like I would to one of my girlfriends.

Our first date, our first kiss for that matter, came about in a very interesting manner. Since he was going to the same university I was a grad student at we would sometimes run into each other on campus, or eat lunch together (neither of us considered eating together when we happened to run into each other, a date). I was outside on the quad and a grad student, Brian, who had been practically stalking me was trying to ask me on a date. I didn't want to be outright rude to him because he was actually a nice guy—I just had no interest in dating him. I had said no to a date, but he didn't get the clue that I wasn't interested. David came up behind me, heard what was going on and, reading my facial expression, he knew I needed some help.

He wrapped his arm around my waist and kissed my cheek, "So, are we still on for tonight's dinner and concert?" he said.

I almost burst out laughing. I saw Brian's eyes widen as I then turned around and kissed David on the lips. As soon as Brian hightailed it I did laugh. David grinned and then said, "So, would you like to go to dinner and a concert tonight?"

I accepted.

Our relationship slowly changed from platonic to romantic. We started dating exclusively when he was in his second year at the university and well into the pre-med program. The day he graduated, we went out to celebrate at the same restaurant we went to on our first date. Then he took me out to an open-air concert and we sat out on a blanket. That was where he proposed to me. Looking up at the stars, listening to the New World Symphony, sitting on a blanket on a cool spring night: it was the setting every girl dreams about. I was twenty-six, but at that moment I felt as giddy as a love-struck teenager. I said yes, of course.

He had been accepted into Medical School, which worried my parents. I'll never forget that conversation. We were eating dinner with my parents two weeks after we got engaged. David was talking about his plans for medical school. I could tell my parents were getting uncomfortable. I couldn't figure out why until my Dad said, "Where are you two going to live?"

Of course, that is what they were worried about. When my younger sister Lauren had been married she and her husband had had no money. They had ended up living with my parents for a year and a half, completely depleting my parents' meager pensions.

David looked thoughtful, so I spoke up to alleviate my parents, "We'll find an apartment somewhere. I can continue my job." I was subtly trying to let them know we would not be a financial burden on them.

"Actually," David said, "I was thinking of buying a house. Kathryn, you don't have to work if you don't want to."

"Then how will you live?" my mother asked, perplexed.

David sighed and looked distinctly uncomfortable, "My parents died when I was one year old. They left enough money for my schooling to be paid for, but I came into my full inheritance when I turned twenty-one. I have enough money to support our family while I am in medical school."

I stared at him. Money had never come up so this was all new to me, "How much money do you have David?"

"When I first enrolled in night classes I had about fifteen million pounds. Over the past four years some of my investments have made good returns and so now my bank accounts total about twenty-two million pounds."

Me and my parents were flabbergasted.

Before the wedding there was one other important conversation. "David? Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course."

"Well, do you remember that first time I talked to you? I asked you if you had any friends." I let him pick it up from there.

He smiled a weary smile, "Yes, I suppose we should talk about that. No, at that point I had no friends. Growing up I had no friends, but

then started at the school my parents had gone to when I turned eleven. I made friends. I had two best friends. I had wonderful teachers; I met people who had known my parents. It was wonderful. When I was fifteen," he sighed, "something happened and everyone I knew and cared about betrayed me. They blamed me for something without proof and turned me out of the school and surrounding community. I didn't truly drop out; I was expelled. I was alone in the world for ten years. I had become so used to being isolated that I didn't know how to handle normal human interaction after so long, Kathryn. That is why it took me so long to even realize I needed it," he paused and said, "I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but I was also afraid that if I opened up to people again I would be betrayed again."

I was trying to take it all in, "How did they betray you?"

"I don't want to talk about it. I never want to think about them again. That was a different lifetime for me. I am someone completely different now. I've had no contact with them for years, and I will be perfectly happy to never have contact with them again."

I knew I wouldn't get anything else out of him on that subject.

The wedding was perfect. Lauren and her husband were there, my parents and my older brother Jacob and his wife Maria were there too. All my friends (most of whom were married long before I was) came with children in tow. They teased me about getting married so late. I wasn't that old—just 26, but most of them had gotten married around twenty or twenty-one.

While he was still in medical school, I worked part time, until I got pregnant. Then I quit work. After Courtney was born, I became a full time mother. David worked hard in medical school to earn his degree as quickly as possible, but because he wasn't working, he could spend time with us. He adored Courtney—she was daddy's little girl. He would take her to the park, take her out for ice cream, play with her. He was the stereotypical doting father. Sometimes I would just look at him and wonder at the change that had come over him, from the sullen withdrawn man I first saw, to the loving, kind, generous and affectionate, but still quiet, husband I loved. He seemed to grow a

capacity to love me and Courtney infinitely, and that capacity seemed to expand even more when Michael was born.

David delivering Michael was an adventure. He knew what to do, even though that was not his field of medicine, and, I have to say, Michael's delivery went much smoother than Courtney's did. That was just a few days before he received his M.D. as a pediatric oncologist.+ Michael was such a calm little baby, unlike his older sister. Courtney is more of a chatterbox, like I am, while Michael and David are perfectly content to sit back and listen most times. Courtney inherited red hair from both her grandmothers and her blue eyes from me. As I have brown hair and blue eyes and David has brown hair and brown eyes, I'm not sure where Michael got his black hair and green eyes. It doesn't run in my family and David hasn't said it runs in his either.

David is happy at his job, for the most part. Once in a while, he loses a patient which is very hard on him, but he has helped so many people. Some of his colleagues call him a miracle worker because he takes the cases that other doctors won't even touch because there is so little hope, and then he gets them in remission. His patients love him as do his patients' parents.

His hours working at the hospital are rough on him. But he usually makes it home for dinner with the family. He always takes off one day a week and gets a month off every summer. We go on vacations. One year we went to Germany, another France, another America. This year we are planning on going to Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

In all honesty, I'm not sure how possible this is (I'm not sure exactly how shares and company ownership work, business economics is not something I know very much about), but I thought it would be fun. I'm sure you can guess who the "despicable co-worker" is.

Oncologist- a cancer specialist

Yes, he manages to squeeze in a little magic to help his patients along.

## A New World

David, tall with brown hair and brown eyes, now approaching his 41st birthday, drove slowly home from the hospital where he worked as an oncologist. He worked long hours and the load never seemed to get any smaller, but he was happy with his job.

He pulled into the driveway of his modest home and went inside.

“Kathryn? Courtney? Michael? I’m home!” he called out.

There was the sound of scampering footsteps and his five-year-old son appeared in the hallway.

“Dinner’s ready David, come on in and let’s eat.” Kathryn, his wife of twelve years said.

Picking up the little boy, David walked to the kitchen to find his eleven-year-old daughter helping her mother set the table.

Setting Michael down, David kissed his wife and then hugged Courtney.

“So how did everything go today?” he asked as he dug savagely into his lasagna.

As his family told him about how they had spent their midsummer’s day, he thought happily about his life. After Courtney and Michael had described their trip to the park that morning, they then started pestering their parents with questions about their vacation.

The next morning dawned bright and clear, an auspicious beginning to David’s month long vacation. He was taking his family to Wales, Scotland and Ireland for the entire month of August. The children were going to miss the first week of school, but it was worth the time together.

They had to go into London to pick up a few items before they left though. As they walked from the subway up onto the street, Courtney eagerly ran ahead (acknowledging with a nod her mother telling her

to meet back in an hour), in order to spend a few minutes in her favorite store: a used bookshop. The store had recently moved to a new, and larger, location. So, she was excited to see the new building.

However, as she approached, she saw something strange; there was a small place situated between the music shop and the used book store that Chris, the owner of the store, had not mentioned. He had told her exactly where the new shop was and said there was a music store on one side and a Pharmacy. He hadn't mentioned this place.

She stopped, looking curiously at the sign "The Leaky Cauldron."

What an odd name for a place. She thought. Curiously enough, she noticed, she seemed to be the only one who saw the establishment. This peaked her interest. She forgot all about her plans to go to the bookshop and instead entered the Leaky Cauldron.

It was dimly lit, with candelabras mounted on the walls. It seemed to be a restaurant pub and inn all combined into one. She looked around in wonder at the very strange clothing exhibited. And what was with the pointy hats?

She slowly continued further into the place, so as not to block the door. The people, however, seemed more interested in the back door, rather than the front door, which puzzled Courtney because all that was back there was an alleyway.

She wandered over to a corner in the main room and sat down, staring at everything in wonder. After a minute, her curiosity got the best of her and she followed a few men and women to the back of the building and out the back door.

It lead to just an alley. A surprisingly clean alley, but an alley nonetheless. Then suddenly the wall moved. Courtney couldn't see how they did it, but it was no longer just an alley.

She slipped through the opening and onto a crowded street with shops lining each side. The people here were all dressed strangely too.

She set off walking, noticing that people were looking at her Levi jeans and Route 66 shirt in consternation. She saw things, however, that confused her even more. All the adults seemed to have sticks in their hands, for what purpose she couldn't fathom. And the shops had the weirdest names! "Quality Quidditch Supplies" (Quidditch? What was that?), "Eeylop's Owl Emporium," (An owl pet shop?) "Magical Menagerie" (Magical? MAGICAL?), and "Ollivander's," were only a few.

She continued walking and found herself at the steps of a great white marble building. Inside the doors were the strangest creatures she had ever seen. They were definitely not human. The closest thing they looked like to her was a Ferengi with Vulcan ears, shrunk down to three feet tall.

She slowly walked up the steps and past the creatures into the lobby of the building. There were more strangely clad men and women and it looked like they were taking gold nuggets from the strange creatures. She stood there staring for a little while until one of the non-human things came up to her and said in a disapproving voice, "No loitering, if you don't have any business to transact in the bank, move along."

Speechless, she just nodded and walked out of the building. She turned back to stare once again at the huge building, which she now knew was a bank, wondering what was going on. She'd never met a creature that wasn't human that could talk (well, except for her friend Abby's parrot, but it didn't work at a bank).

She turned back around and ran smack into someone.

"Sorry!" she gasped as packages went flying in all different directions.

"It's quite alright, I couldn't see where I was going with all these packages in my arms," said a man's voice, who sounded an awful lot like her Grandfather Taylor. Courtney scurried around helping him retrieve his packages. Then she got a good look at him.

He was a very old man, with long white beard and hair. He had a somewhat crooked nose and was wearing spectacles. The man was

wearing...robes that were the same color light blue as his eyes. The eyes actually reminded Courtney of her mother.

The man shifted his packages and freed a hand, "Thank you, Miss...?"

"Barnes, Courtney Barnes." She shook his hand.

"Albus Dumbledore, Miss Barnes. Do you mind if I inquire as to where your parents are? You shouldn't be out alone."

Courtney flushed, "Well, I was running to the bookshop and I saw a little place called 'The Leaky Cauldron' I decided to check it out. I followed some people and found this strip of shops." She explained.

The man looked concerned, why though, she couldn't figure out.

"How old are you, child?" he asked gently.

"I turned eleven in May."

"Ah, I see," a twinkle lit his eyes, "Miss Barnes, I would like to welcome you to the wizarding world."

"The what world?"

"Wizarding world. You are a witch, you're magical."

"There is such a thing as magic?" she asked in awe.

In response, the old man set his packages down on the steps and pulled a stick out of his pocket. Courtney looked at him, confused.

"This is a magic wand. Here, give it a wave." He handed it to her she grasped it and waved it around a bit, not really expecting anything. To her surprise, red sparks shot out ...and lit the man's beard on fire.

He chuckled and quickly patted it out. Courtney, however, was mortified, "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to!" she hastily handed the wand back to him, before she could do any more damage.

“It’s okay.” He reassured her, he then pulled something else out of his pocket and tapped it with the wand. It looked like some old parchment paper. “Here, take this. I suspect that you would be receiving it in the next few days anyway.”

She looked at it. It was a letter, addressed in green ink, to her. As she turned it over in her hand, she caught sight of her watch and gasped.

“I was supposed to meet back with my parents five minutes ago!” she said.

Albus Dumbledore quickly picked up his packages again and said, “Allow me to escort you back to them then.”

Courtney gratefully accepted this offer, as she wasn’t quite sure how to get back through the Leaky Cauldron.

“Sir?” she asked while they walked, “If you have a magic wand, why don’t you just...do something to those packages, rather than lugging them around?”

He chuckled, “You’re a quick thinker, Miss Barnes. I happen to have some items in here that would react badly if I levitated them or shrunk them.”

“Oh,” she had never thought about that before.

She followed the man through the crowds and back through the pub out onto the London street.

At the door the man turned to her and said, “It was a pleasure meeting you, I look forward to meeting you again.”

“Good-bye!” with that, Courtney practically ran to the subway entrance as the man went back into the pub trying to figure out who the red-haired, blue-eyed child reminded him of.

“Where have you been, young lady?” her mother demanded as Courtney breathlessly approached them.

“Sorry! I lost track of the time.”

“Where were you? I called the bookshop on my mobile, but Chris said he hadn’t seen you,” her father said, mentioning the bookshop owner, who had developed a fondness for Courtney, since she was such a frequent customer.

“Well, I found a strange little place I’d never seen before and so I took a look at it. I just forgot to look at my watch.”

Her mother looked curious now, “What do you mean a place you ‘never seen before’? We’ve been coming over here since before you were born.”

“No Mum, remember the bookshop moved. It’s a little restaurant and inn called ‘The Leaky Cauldron.’” She decided it might not be the best thing to mention to her parents that it was also a pub, “It’s right beside the bookshop. Anyway, Mum, I found out the most amazing thing! Magic is real. I’m a witch.” As the family walked down to the subway Courtney babbled on, “You see at the back of the Leaky Cauldron there’s an alleyway and you tap the bricks or something like that and an archway appears and it leads to a road. It is lined with the funniest little shops. I wandered around there a little bit and then I bumped into this old man who said his name was Albus Bumble-something-or-other. He told me that I was a witch.” Courtney’s eyes lit as she remembered, “Oh! He gave me a letter.” She took it out of her pocket and quickly peeled the wax.

She opened the letter and read over it eagerly.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore

Dear Miss Courtney Barnes,

It has come to our attention that you are a witch, a being in possession of magical powers. We are pleased to invite you to attend

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, one of the most prestigious schools of magic in the world.

We have scheduled for a representative from our school to come to your house at 7 o'clock tonight to answer any questions you might have.

You will find enclosed your school supplies list; all items listed can be found in Diagon Alley. Please note that the school year starts September 1. The Hogwarts Express leaves London's Kings Cross station at 11 o'clock from Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

We congratulate you on your acceptance and hope you have a pleasant summer.

Minerva McGonagall

Deputy Headmistress.

Courtney then handed the letter to her parents. Her mother looked skeptical. "Honey, there is no such thing as magic," she started to say.

"Oh, I thought the same thing at first, but then Mr.," she glanced quickly back at the letter, "Dumbledore handed me his wand. I gave it a wave and I accidentally set fire to his beard!" Courtney giggled.

Her father hunched and said, "We are supposed to be leaving on vacation!"

"David, I think we can hold off another day. I want to see what this is all about. We can greet whoever is coming tonight and then leave in the morning." Kathryn said reasonably.

Dr. Barnes, however, did not look happy in the slightest.

A/N: Next chapter will be shorter- a David/Harry point of view on Courtney's little adventure into Diagon Alley. Chapter after that will be the visitor to their house to explain about the wizarding world.

Important note:

Comment on Harry/David “approaching his 41st birthday”: Although it is early August and Harry’s birthday has already passed, no one but Harry knows that. David Barnes’ birthday is in late August, so he and his family celebrate it while on their yearly vacation.

## Her Choice

You knew it was going to happen sometime soon. You've known that letter was coming ever since she summoned a bottle when she was fourteen months. I keep talking to myself as I drive around. I told Kathryn that, since we weren't leaving until tomorrow, I needed to run a few more errands. Instead, I drive to the park and sit on a bench beside the pond.

It has been eighteen years since I had any contact with my former life. I have tried my hardest to separate myself from everything I was then. I manage to go for days at a time without think of magic.

Magic. That is the first time in a long time that I have said the actual word to myself in years. All my old possessions, except my wand, are in a storage unit that my family knows nothing about. To my shame, I still use my wand sometimes, to renew my disguise and to help my patients when there is no other recourse. And of course, to answer particular unwanted mail.

I'm avoiding the subject. Courtney. I have to deal with this. Michael will be getting a letter when he turns eleven too. I've known that ever since he apparated from his crib into my lap when he was ten months.

I'm still avoiding the subject, aren't I?

I can't tell them. I don't want them to know. I don't want to deal with all telling them entails. But do I want my daughter in that world, with them? The ones who were once my friends. I don't like the idea.

No, she won't be going to Hogwarts. I stand and walk resolutely to my car, but slow as I reach for the door handle.

How can I make that decision for her? What right do I have to deny her what I have denied myself? I chose my exile, my new life. I have no right to enforce my exile on her, do I?

I'm her father! I can enforce whatever rules I see necessary. She will not be going to Hogwarts!

But then I would have to explain. Kathryn wouldn't let me just say no. She wouldn't like it either if I made a decision like this without her. I already know that Kathryn will say yes.

So, am I supposed to entrust my daughter to them? How can I trust them? I haven't trusted any of them since I was fifteen.

My mind wanders to them, and I wonder who will be coming tonight. I hope it is no one I know. I don't know if I'll be able to handle that.

I walk over to the edge of the pond, pick up a rock, and send it skipping. It isn't a very good; it skips twice and then sinks.

What am I going to do? I sit back down on the same bench and watch the ducks. I'll miss Courtney.

What? Where did that come from? I haven't agreed to let her go! I want to protect her from them. A different thought creeps in; I want to protect myself. No! I want to protect her!

I am angry. How dare they put me in this position! I sigh. It isn't their fault she has powers. That is my fault.

Can I punish my daughter for my faults? No.

I hate them! I don't want anything to do with them, nor do I want my daughter to do anything with them. I don't trust them. I never wanted any association with them again. I don't want the letters that I still get. I don't want to think about my past, about what happened.

But I have to!

I can't impose my will unjustly on Courtney. I never have before and I won't start now. So, I leave this choice to an eleven year old who has no notion of what could happen?

There's an easy remedy to that.

Easy? No telling the story of my past would not be an easy thing. So, I let her decide? I must.

So, Courtney will be going to Hogwarts. I know she won't turn down the opportunity.

I don't want to imagine her there. But images come unbidden to my mind. I wonder who is teaching.... No! I don't want to know. I don't care anymore. That is no longer my life! So do I just sit idly by and watch my daughter embrace that world? I guess I have to. I have no other choice.

It hurts to think of her leaving. Living among them. Becoming one of them.

I was once one of them. That doesn't matter! I'm not anymore! I stopped being one of them, when I started calling them, them. Did that thought even make sense?

What will I do? Give her my blessing? I could never do that. I can't bring myself to do that.

I will say neither yea nor nay. I will be neutral. I will not get involved, nor will I hinder her. It is her choice and I will neither support nor deny it. That is my resolve.

I walk to my car and drive home dreading the hour that brings our visitor.

I only hope that I can stand firm.

## The Visitor

That night, at seven o'clock on the dot the doorbell rang. Courtney rushed to answer it.

A man with long black robes and short black hair stood at the door.

"Miss Courtney Barnes, I presume?"

She nodded excitedly. He stuck his hand out for her to shake, "My name is Sirius Black, or Professor Black to you. I teach Defense against the Dark Arts at Hogwarts."

By then Kathryn had approached and spoke, "Mr. Black, please come in. We have quite a few questions for you."

Sirius walked in and caught sight of a man with dark brown hair carrying a tired child with black hair out of the room.

"That was my husband, David, and my six-year-old Michael. David should be down soon. He's just putting Michael to bed. Have a seat"

Sirius nodded amiably and took the proffered seat.

Sure enough, David returned minutes later. However, instead of sitting, he just crossed his arms and addressed Sirius.

"I have no wish for you or your kind to be in my house. I have no wish for my daughter to train her powers. However, I am not in the habit of making decisions like this for my children. If she wishes to attend this...school of yours she may, but I want nothing to do with it. After this little meeting you are going to have is over, I don't want any of you to come to my house again. I don't like the idea of this magic," he spit it out as though it was a foul word, "mark my words, it will bring nothing but grief to this family. I don't want anything to do with it." With that, he left the room.

Sirius looked slightly put out, Kathryn's face showed surprise, that was quickly becoming anger, but Courtney looked like she was about to cry.

“Well,” Sirius said uncomfortably.

Kathryn took a deep breath, “I don’t know what possessed my husband to act like that, but I do apologize, Mr. Black.”

“No need to Mrs. Barnes. There are some Muggles who just don’t like the idea of magic and decide they don’t want to be involved with it.”

“Muggles?” Courtney asked, momentarily forgetting the tears that had been threatening.

“Muggle is what we call people who have no magical powers. You are a muggle-born witch.”

With that, all three put Dr. Barnes’ strange behavior behind them and talked for two hours about the wizarding world.

Near the end Sirius asked, “You say you are going on vacation? That you won’t be back until September 5th?”

They nodded.

“Well, that causes a problem because you have to be at school on September first. Do you know where you will be, say, on August 31st?”

Kathryn got up and went to the kitchen to look at their vacation itinerary. “Dublin, Ireland.”

“Okay, I think that we can arrange for someone to pick Courtney up that day, wherever you are in Ireland. Then Courtney can shop for her school supplies that day and get to school on the first. Would that be okay with you?”

Kathryn thought for a moment, “I’m sorry, I’m not comfortable with letting my daughter go off with just anybody.”

Sirius smiled, “I can understand that. The woman I have in mind is Hermione Granger. She teaches the history course at Hogwarts. She

is married to a man named Ron Weasley, who used to play Quidditch professionally, but now coaches the team he used to play on. She just goes by Granger at the school because it would be too confusing because Bill Weasley, her brother-in-law, teaches Charms. She has a daughter that is Courtney's age who will also be starting at Hogwarts this year. Her name is Angela." Sirius fished in his pocket and brought out a picture, "This is her family," and he handed it to them.

For the first minute, Courtney and Kathryn just stared because the picture was moving and then they really looked at the people.

The woman, obviously Hermione Granger, had wavy brown hair that she had tried to coax back from her face with a hair band, but was not having much success because a small girl with red hair had grabbed it and was attempting to remove it from the woman's head. There were two boys, one with red hair and one with brown hair, who had gotten distracted from the camera and were making faces at each other. The oldest girl, they assumed it was Angela, had brown hair and was scowling at her father, a tall man with red hair, because, in trying to get the two boys to look at the camera, had accidentally elbowed his eldest in the nose.

"The little red-head is named Mariah. The redhead boy is Markus; the brown-haired one is Harry. I've known Ron and Hermione for more than twenty-five years now."

"Okay, Hermione Granger can pick Courtney up on August 31st." Kathryn finally agreed, "How much money will Courtney need for supplies?"

"Well, I don't know the exchange rate between our money and yours, so I couldn't rightly tell you, but Hermione'll know for sure. Just ask her when she comes."

"You use different money?" Courtney asked, wide-eyed, connecting what she had seen during her visit to Diagon Alley at the bank.

This launched Sirius into a ten-minute explanation about the wizarding monetary and economic system. When he finished, he

wished them a good evening and disappeared right in front of their faces.

David's resolve to remain completely neutral disappeared as soon as he had stepped into the house. It was all he could do to simply stand there and speak, rather than punching. He grimaced at himself, You shouldn't have let it affect you so easily!

He recalled his words and shook his head at his own lack of control. His statement had certainly not sounded neutral. Well, he had said it, and, he realized, he had meant it. He did not want any of them coming to his house.

He had almost completely refused to allow Courtney to go when he saw him.

He hurriedly got ready for bed to avoid Kathryn's wrath, at least until morning. He pushed aside thoughts of Courtney's hurt expression. He was not rejecting his daughter, he told himself. He mentally berated himself for the small flicker of...love? Friendship? Hope? Happiness?...he couldn't figure out the emotion that...that had flashed through him when he saw Sirius.

Sirius. He hadn't even called him that name in more than twenty-five years. He couldn't think of him as that name anymore. That was the name of the man who had given Harry Potter hope for a better life-hope for a loving home.

It was also the name of the man who betrayed you! He told himself. Busying himself with his task of brushing his teeth, he said firmly in his mind, Mr. Black.

He was a teacher now. He must have been officially pardoned...No! David shook his head and pushed all thoughts of the visitor, and the significance of the visit, out of his mind, and went to bed.

"So, Sirius, how did you like young Miss Barnes?" Albus asked when he found his friend returning.

“Delightful young lady!” Sirius smiled, remembering the ease with which he had explained everything to Courtney.

“And the family? What were they like?”

A shadow crossed Sirius’ face and he sighed, “The mother is almost as excited as the girl, but the father is dead set against magic for some reason.”

Albus nodded sadly at this, “We get at least one parent like that every year. People just become afraid of what they don’t understand. It is sad to see how much the children are hurt by their parent’s rejection of what they are. What does Mr. Barnes do for a living?”

“He is a doctor, quite a good one from what I am told, and quite wealthy too. He could have retired years ago, but he likes what he does. His wife told me he had inherited quite a lot of money and was a millionaire before she met him. However, they live in a modest three bedroom house.”

“Well, I think I can guess as to why Mr. Barnes doesn’t like the idea of magic. He is a man of science. Magic doesn’t follow the natural rules of matter and so he rejects it because he is set in his Laws of Nature.”

Sirius nodded, “I guess that makes sense. The family is going on vacation though so I ...er, volunteered Hermione to pick her up in Dublin Ireland on August 31st.”

“I certainly hope you got more detailed information than that. Dublin and vicinity have many inhabitants,” Albus smiled.

“Of course I did. I’ll just talk to Hermione tomorrow and let her know.”

Hermione Granger-Weasley was trying to get her lesson plans in order after Mariah had systematically destroyed her organization by using the desk as a jungle gym. A knock on her office door was a welcome relief.

“Come in!” she called looking at the door, “Oh, hello Sirius. Anything I can do for you?”

The man chuckled at the mess and the curious two-year-old that was opening and closing drawers. “You’re lucky you teach history, and not a dangerous subject like Defense, otherwise she might get a few nasty surprises opening things carelessly like that.”

Hermione rolled her eyes, “Well, if I did teach Defense, you can guarantee I wouldn’t let her in my office at all. What did you want?”

“Right. Well, Albus told you about Courtney Barnes, the Muggleborn girl who stumbled upon Diagon Alley?”

“Yes.”

“Her family is going on a vacation and they won’t be back until September fifth. Her parents won’t be able to escort her to get her supplies or to the train station on the first. I told them that you would be able to pick her up on the 31st, take her shopping, and make sure she gets to the school. The mother agreed to the plan.”

“Well, thank you for asking me first,” Hermione frowned, but became distracted as she noticed Mariah’s latest mischief, “No! Mariah, don’t play with Mommy’s wand!” she plucked the stick out of the child’s hand and handed her a toy broom instead, “Honestly, if I didn’t know any better I’d think your father was one of the twins!” Mariah smiled and started whacking the broom against the desk. Hermione rolled her eyes and shrugged, turning back to Sirius, “What do you mean, her mother agreed, what about her father?”

Sirius sighed, “Mr. Or doctor, I should say, Barnes almost outright refused to allow Courtney to come to Hogwarts, he wasn’t very receptive. He refused to listen to me. After stating, point-blank, that he did not want a witch in his family he said the choice was hers and then left the room. I can’t imagine what he’ll act like when his son gets a letter in a few years.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow, “His son is magical too?”

Sirius nodded a little sheepishly, "I peeked at the book this morning."

Hermione sighed, "Why are some people so closed minded? How awful must it be, for that child to know her father rejects a part of her? I just want to curse every parent I hear of that does this," Hermione stopped and then continued more softly, "I used to feel the same way when I heard Harry talking about the Dursleys' rejection of him."

Sirius smiled sadly and quickly changed the subject, "So, can you pick up Courtney the morning of the 31st?"

"I guess so,"

"Good! Here is the hotel they will be at." Sirius pulled a piece of Muggle paper out of his pocket and handed it to Hermione.

She looked at it, "Dublin? It'll probably just be easier to take her back to the house and let her walk up with Angela and I. Angela isn't going to take the train. If we pick up Courtney, at least it will give Angela someone to talk to while we finish up our last minute preparations."

"That should work fine. Do you want me to take this little munchkin off of your hands so you can get your office back in order?" Sirius asked picking up Mariah who protested until Sirius handed her a bauble.

"Would you? Thank you so much! Angela is at a friend's house, so are the boys, but I had nowhere to leave Mariah. Ron's running a practice today."

"I should think so! The European Cup is in three weeks. I was planning on going to see Remus, I can just take her along."

"Thank you, Sirius! You are a lifesaver."

"Am I forgiven for volunteering you with out asking?" Sirius asked grinning as he took the diaper bag from Hermione.

"Yes," Hermione answered emphatically.

## Diagon Alley, Again

David had gone to bed early for three reasons. The first was he didn't want to think too much about what was happening, secondly he didn't want to encounter that man downstairs, and the third reason was to avoid the wrath of his wife, which would surely fall at some point.

The next morning when Kathryn shook him awake, he knew that it had fallen.

"What in the world possessed you to say those things last night?" she hissed at him.

"I meant every word of it, Kathryn. I do not like the idea of magic. I will allow Courtney to choose as she likes, but that doesn't mean I have to like it."

"Do you have any idea how much you hurt Courtney? You are rejecting your daughter!"

David sat straight up, "I am not rejecting my daughter. She is still my child and I would die for her if I needed to, but I don't like this magic. It isn't natural; it shouldn't be real. It doesn't follow the natural order of things."

Kathryn looked at him with incomprehension, "So this is because you can't find where it fits into your perfectly ordered world?" she asked incredulously.

"I don't want to talk about it any more."

"Well too bad! We are going to talk about it." Kathryn said firmly.

"Kathryn, this discussion is over. She can attend that school and develop her magic as she likes, but I will never be comfortable with it. End of discussion. We need to pack the car and get going." With that, he stood and got dressed, leaving his wife confused. David had never acted like this before.

The family vacation was considerably less enjoyable than anticipated. When Kathryn and Courtney started explaining about magic to Michael, David left the room. If they were in the car and the subject came up then David would quickly change the subject. David's birthday was even more strained because it was two days before Professor Granger would come.

On August 31st, David stiffly told his daughter goodbye and left the hotel they were staying at an hour before Hermione Granger was supposed to show up and didn't return until two hours after they had left.

When he came back in his wife looked at him and said, tight-lipped, "David, I suggest you not talk to me for a few hours, because I might regret what I will say."

Courtney on the other hand was getting to know Angela Weasley and her mother Hermione Granger. They were on their way to Diagon Alley to buy her supplies.

"Your mother gave me your money so we can exchange it at Gringotts and open you an account there. That way you can make withdrawals as you need to. After we exchange currencies then we'll get your clothes and supplies. Here we are," she said as the three of them entered a wizarding establishment called The Headless Goblin and over to a fireplace.

She took a pouch from around her belt and spoke to Courtney, "This is called Floo Powder; it's a way that we travel. You throw it in the fire, then step in, and call out your destination. Angela, will you please go first and show Courtney?"

Angela took a pinch of powder from the pouch and then threw it in the fire. It turned green and she stepped in shouting "Diagon Alley!" then she disappeared and the flames turned orange again.

"Now you try it, don't be nervous."

Nervously, Courtney took a pinch of the stuff and threw it in the fire. She stepped in and was surprised to find that it tickled. "Diagon Alley," she called out in what she hoped was a confidant voice.

She was then moving in a whirl of color, instinctively she closed her eyes and hugged her arms around herself. Suddenly she stopped moving and landed with a thump, almost falling on her face as she stumbled out of the fireplace. Angela reached out and caught her. Courtney was grateful the girl took after her father in height and strength.

A few moments later Professor Granger accompanied them out of the Leaky Cauldron and into Diagon Alley.

They went to Gringotts and the goblins exchanged her money. Courtney had to be reminded how the monetary system worked. They opened an account and Hermione told Courtney to put most of it in the vault and keep only a little bit for her supplies.

"Well, where do you want to go first?" Hermione asked their guest; Angela had already bought her supplies.

"Books first!" Courtney's eyes lit up and Hermione smiled, reminding herself to tell Ron that she wasn't the only one who enjoyed the written word.

They went to Flourish and Blotts and spent an hour there. On top of all the required books, she also emerged with a number of other books (all recommended by Professor Granger) including Hogwarts: a History, Revised and Expanded; Recent Developments in Wizarding History; So, You're a Witch: A Guide to the World of Magic for the Muggle-born Witch, and Nifty Charms they Never Teach at Hogwarts.

"I think, we had better find you a trunk next," Hermione said as she watched her student struggle with her load of books in a fashion that greatly reminded her of herself.

After getting said trunk they went to Madam Malkin's for robes and other clothing, then to the Apothecary for her Potions kit, scales and

cauldron. From there, they purchased her animal, a male eagle owl, which she named Rex. Finally, they approached Ollivander's.

"What is your name young lady?" the man asked, looking shrewdly at her.

"Courtney Barnes, sir."

"Well, Miss Barnes, which hand is your wand hand?"

"I'm right-handed."

The wizard proceeded to walk around picking out a few choice wands and bringing them back to the counter.

Courtney tried all of them and they had either no response, or disastrous results. As Mr. Ollivander moved the already tried ones aside and went back for more, Courtney noticed a pile of boxes sitting at the other end of the counter. Curiously, she walked over to them.

"What are these here for?" she asked as the wand-maker returned, arms reloaded with wands.

"Those are brand new, I haven't shelved them yet. New wands normally don't work very well. They have to...settle."

They proceeded to go through the second pile with no luck. As Mr. Ollivander was gathering a third armload, Courtney decided to try the new wands.

The first three gave absolutely no response. The fourth however, had a different feel. Touching it, she felt like she was greeting an old friend as it warmed in her grip. A beautiful stream of red and gold fireworks emitted from the tip.

Hermione and Angela clapped enthusiastically. Mr. Ollivander however, dropped all the wands he was holding and stared at her in disbelief.

"I never expected that wand to be sold so quickly!"

“Why? What about it?” Courtney asked, distracted.

“This wand is made of oak and is ten and a half inches long with a Phoenix feather core. After ten years of badgering, six months ago I finally convinced Albus to give me a third feather from his pet Phoenix. (Hermione gasped at this point and turned pale) Your wand core has a tail feather from the same bird that cores of Harry Potter and the Dark Lord’s wands came from.”

Courtney was confused, “Who’re Harry Potter and the Dark Lord?”

Hermione hastily composed herself and said, “Pay for the wand and we’ll explain it to you after we get you back to my house.”

They did so and walked back to the Leaky Cauldron. They used the fireplace there to travel to the Granger-Weasley household in Hogsmeade.

“So, what’s the deal with my wand?” Courtney asked after they had showed her the room she would be staying the night in.

“Harry Potter was a wizard about thirty years ago. He was very powerful. At the same time, there was another wizard, the Dark Lord, who was also very powerful but did a lot of bad things with his power. At Hogwarts, Harry was one of my best friends. In our fifth year however, something happened, Harry was framed for murder and nobody believed he was innocent because he was so powerful. They sent Harry to prison. Ten years later though we found out who had framed Harry. He was freed, but he felt completely betrayed and so he left the Wizarding world. No one has seen him in almost twenty years. You’ll learn more in my class this year.” Hermione added quietly.

Courtney could see it wasn’t something that Hermione liked to talk about and so she didn’t address the subject again.

That afternoon she rode her first broomstick, complements of Angela. She met her new friends’ siblings (Markus was eight, Harry seven, and Mariah two) and tried some magic with her new wand.

“Mum says that technically we aren’t allowed to do magic out of school, but since we haven’t actually started school yet the rule doesn’t actually say we can’t. This is the only summer we will ever be able to do magic until we graduate.” Angela explained sadly, then she brightened, “Although, Dad said that they wouldn’t be able to detect my magic if I were at Hogwarts during the summer. So when Mum is up at the school during the summer and I go too, I can practice. Though, Mum wouldn’t be too happy if she found out.”

At dinner, Courtney met Ron. He was very enthusiastic to tell her all about how the Quidditch League worked and about the winning streak his team, the Chudley Cannons, was on. As far as she could tell Mr. Weasley had played for years as a “Chaser”, then retired, and become a team coach. He bragged about his team winning the European Cup the week before and then confused Courtney to no end (because she still had no real idea what Quidditch was like) as he described the game in great detail. She resorted to smiling and nodding.

After dinner, Hermione told them to go to bed. They wouldn’t be able to sleep in very long, even though they weren’t going to ride the Hogwarts Express, because Hermione had to be up at the school and Ron was going to take care of Markus, Harry and Mariah.

When they were awoken the next morning, they eagerly got ready and walked from the village to the school with Hermione.

Courtney gasped at the huge castle and vast grounds that comprised Hogwarts. She was amazed, she had never seen, never imagined that such a place could exist. As they entered, she saw Albus Dumbledore. She waved excitedly at him and he chuckled and waved back. “Welcome, Miss Barnes. I told you we’d see each other again! Miss Weasley, would you mind giving your friend a tour of the school? Perhaps you could introduce her to any teachers you meet on the way?”

Angela nodded excitedly as she pulled Courtney’s arm, while Hermione started talking to Professor Dumbledore.

“Has Ollivander contacted you?” she asked.

The Headmaster looked a little surprised at this, “No, why?”

“Well, I suspect the owl is on its way then. Courtney Barnes’ wand is brother to Harry’s and Voldemort’s,” she told him bluntly.

Dumbledore’s eyebrows shot up in surprise, “That is unexpected.”

“Ollivander said he didn’t expect to sell that wand so soon. I understand he has been begging another feather from Fawkes?”

“Yes, now that it is in use, he’ll probably want another.” A thoughtful look came over his face, “I wonder what Harry is doing now.” He mused.

Hermione nodded, “I don’t live a single day without wondering that. I wonder if he has kept the bitterness. I wouldn’t blame him if he had, but I hope for his sake, he hasn’t. I have managed to move on from my mistake at that point, but I always remember it with regret.”

Dumbledore nodded his understanding of her sentiments. “When was the last time you tried to contact him?”

Hermione grimaced, “Five years ago. First time I wrote him I got no answer, second time, five years ago, well, you remember what happened.”

Albus chuckled.

“Why have you never tried to contact him, sir?” Hermione asked curiously.

“Before he left, I swore him a wizard’s oath. I cannot break my word.” Albus said sadly, “Only when he contacts me, willingly, first, can I contact him.”

Wahoo! New chapter up in record time! Well, it helps that this was part of the original idea framework that has been living on my hard

drive since December. Just don't expect the next one up so soon!  
Next chapter will be Courtney's sorting and her first letter home.

## At Hogwarts

Angela eagerly showed Courtney around Hogwarts. She knew her way around as well as any student because she had lived there on and off since she was four. Courtney, however, was certain that she would never be able to figure out all the passages and stairs-especially the ones that changed.

As they were walking up one flight, Courtney's leg went through a step. Angela, hearing her indignant yells, turned around and started laughing, "Sorry, I forgot to warn you about the trick stair. You have to learn how to jump it. Here, let me help you." Angela succeeded in pulling Courtney out of the stair. After that, when they got up to the landing, Courtney almost fell when it started moving. "These stairs are dangerous!" she exclaimed, huffily as Angela was sent into another fit of giggles, "I happened to inherit my mother's clumsiness! My dad is very graceful, but my mother can't even wear high-heels because she trips so easily."

The two of them continued exploring, Angela telling her about the portraits (they had conversations with a few) and the rooms etc. that they passed. They also met a number of the ghost residents, Nearly Headless Nick, The Grey Lady, the Fat Friar and unfortunately, Peeves.

As they descended the stairs to tour the dungeons and Angela pointed out the Potions classroom a man, resembling an overgrown vulture, came swooping down the hallway from a nearby office.

When he saw them he let out a bark, "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Professor Snape, the Headmaster asked me to give Courtney a tour. She is a muggle-born first year," Angela said respectfully.

Professor Snape snorted and stalked on down the hallway.

"What was that?" Courtney asked giggling.

“That was Professor Snape, he teaches potions. He’s really famous for it. Anyway, Mum and Dad say that you should never get on his bad side. He used to hate everyone who wasn’t in his house, Slytherin, but Dumbledore mellowed him some and now he only makes you miserable after you melt your first cauldron.”

“And you know this how?”

“My cousins. I have six cousins who already go here and five that have already graduated; my dad is the sixth of seven children. Luckily, none of my uncles seems to be into large families so far. In fact, my family has the most children. My cousin Caleb, his father is Uncle Fred, will be starting here this year too.”

They continued exploring and ran into a number of other teachers—all of whom were much more pleasant than Snape had been, Courtney thought. Angela introduced her to the Deputy Headmistress and Transfiguration teacher, Professor McGonagall, the Flying instructor Ginny Finch-Fletchley (Angela’s aunt), Professor Weasley, the charms teacher, and Professor Longbottom who taught Herbology. As they were making their way towards Angela’s mother’s rooms they ran into Professor Black and someone Courtney hadn’t met yet.

He was introduced as Remus Lupin, the care of magical creatures teacher, which Courtney found out, she wouldn’t be able to take until third year.

“What other choices are there for electives?” Courtney asked as Sirius invited them all for a small lunch.

“Well,” Angela said cutting off the professors replies, “there’s Care of magical creatures, Arithmancy, Divination, Ancient Runes, and then there are one or two that get taught according to interest, like Music and Magic, or Magical Theory, or one year they even had Wandless Magic as a course. Muggle Studies used to be an elective, but for the past ten years it has been mandatory for all first-year purebloods to take it. Muggleborns get an extra History of Magic course instead.”

“You mean I have to take twice the normal amount of history?”

“Not exactly,” Sirius said, “your regular class with Professor Granger will be like a normal history class, your other class with your fellow muggleborns will not be as demanding, or have as much work, it will be more like an... introduction to wizarding culture. It is so you can learn what most purebloods grew up knowing. The same is true for the purebloods taking Muggle Studies—they will be learning what the world you know is like.”

“Oh, that makes sense.” Courtney said.

Late in the evening Hermione found the two of them and hurried them to the Entrance. As the upper year students began filing into the Great Hall, Courtney and Angela waited with Professor McGonagall for the first years to arrive after their voyage across the lake.

When they had arrived, they all followed the deputy headmistress into the Great Hall for the Sorting. Angela had explained how the sorting worked to Courtney and told her a little bit about the houses. Courtney privately thought that Ravenclaw suited her.

The sorting hat was placed on the stool and began to sing—which surprised Courtney, even though Angela had already told her it would. Singing hats were not a part of everyday life for her, yet.

After the hat had finished singing and the applause died down, Professor McGonagall pulled out a roll of parchment and started calling out names.

“Barnes, Courtney!” was the first. I guess there are no A’s Courtney thought to herself as she sat down on the stool and put the hat on.

Hello there, now which house would be best for you? A small voice said in her ear.

Maybe Ravenclaw? She answered back.

Well, there is no denying you’d do well there, you have quite a good mind in here, but I’m not sure the hat mused, You’re also a very

determined young lady. You might do well in Slytherin, you even have...oh my, I haven't seen that in years.

Seen what? Courtney asked, confused.

You just have a rather rare talent that I haven't seen since...well, never mind. You might do well in Slytherin.

Really? Courtney thought rather doubtfully.

Hmmm, maybe you're right, you aren't much good at anything requiring subtlety, are you.

Courtney blushed, no.

I think you'd do best in Gryffindor, my dear, you are very determined and you have the courage to seize this opportunity, despite your father's attitude towards the situation. Yes, I think you should be in GRYFFINDOR!" The last word was shouted out for all to hear and one of the tables, presumably Gryffindor, started clapping enthusiastically.

Courtney rushed to join them and ended up sitting next to a brown-haired fifth-year who introduced herself as Monica Weasley.

"Weasley? Are you one of Angela's cousins?"

"Yes, My father is Percy Weasley."

Courtney frowned, "Percy Weasley? Haven't I heard that name before?"

Monica gave a small nod, "Most likely, he's the Minister of Magic."

"Oh, right! That was in one of the books I read."

She met a few other people and then they all turned their attention back to the sorting as "Jones, Benjamin!" was sorted into Ravenclaw.

The sorting continued and a pair of fraternal twins, Megan and Timothy, were both sorted into Gryffindor. “Marks, Tiffany,” was sorted into Hufflepuff, while Courtney tried to calm her rumbling stomach—the lunch with the professors had been a long time ago. Finally, the list ended with Angela and Caleb both being sorted into Gryffindor.

Professor Dumbledore stood, “Welcome, all of you, to a brand new year at Hogwarts. Eat up!”

Food galore appeared and Courtney quickly dug in to some chicken cordon bleu. Angela, sitting to her left, was exclaiming excitedly about the fact that they would be in the same room.

Then they got into a conversation with the two other girls that would be sharing the room with them, Megan Stratford and Katie Corcoran. Katie was a muggle-born, like Courtney and Megan was a halfblood—her mother was a witch and her father was a muggle. This situation brought up a question for Courtney, which she asked to everyone around her in general, “Which class do halfbloods take? Muggle studies or the intro to the wizarding world class?”

Monica answered saying, “It depends on how they were raised. Take Caleb for example, his mother is a muggle, but he was raised mostly in the wizarding world so he’ll be taking Muggle studies. There have been cases where the opposite is true. If a student is equally knowledgeable about both worlds, he or she is put into Muggle studies by default. Sometimes though, if that is the case, the parents request the student to be put into some of the other classes offered on request like biology, chemistry, physics, algebra, or something like that.”

When dinner ended and the first-years were lead to the entrance of Gryffindor tower, most were dead-tired. Angela and Courtney, however, were not, so instead of joining their new housemates and going to sleep, they sat in the common room for a little while talking.

“The sorting hat was kind of strange,” Courtney commented.

“What do you mean by that?”

"Well it said something like I had a special talent that it hadn't seen in a long time. I just wonder what it is talking about."

"Huh, I don't know. Maybe you'll find out in one of our classes. I thought you were going to write a letter to your family."

"That's what I was about to do," it took Courtney a few minutes to figure out how to use a quill and ink without getting blotches on her parchment. She finally got the hang of it and wrote her letter.

Dear Mum, Dad and Michael,

Wow, these past two days have been amazing. Yesterday, shopping in Diagon Alley, was really fun. I got an owl, I named him Rex—he's the one I'm sending this with. I bought all my books and supplies (the supplies for potions are really strange) and I got a wand. It is elm, ten inches with a phoenix feather for a core. Can you believe phoenixes really exist? Anyway, the wand maker said that my wand core came from the headmaster's pet phoenix and that two other wands had the same core—a dark wizard and a man named Harry Potter.

Hogwarts is amazing—it is a castle, just like a fairy tale. All the portraits move around and can talk. I was sorted in Gryffindor house—Gryffindor is known for bravery. The other houses are Hufflepuff-known for loyalty- Ravenclaw-known for wisdom- and Slytherin-known for ambition. The hat (there is this really old hat that you put on and it tells you which house you belong in) said I'd have done well in Slytherin. Then it said something strange—that I had a special talent that it hadn't seen in a long time. Maybe it is something related to my wand—since everyone seems to think it is special too. Did any of you ever notice I had a strange talent?

Now, I'm getting tired and classes start tomorrow.

Goodbye, I love you!

Courtney

She sent it off with Rex and then went up to her bed, promptly falling asleep.

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Two days after the Barnes family-minus Courtney- returned to their London suburb home Courtney's letter arrived. Kathryn, who had gotten around to speaking to her husband again after his refusal to meet the woman who was taking Courtney to shop for school supplies and then to the school, excitedly opened the letter and started reading it out loud, when David left the room. He didn't want to hear the letter.

Kathryn was furious once again, but decided to wait until Michael had gone to school to confront him, by that time however, David had gone to work. After Michael had gone to bed that night Kathryn did confront him.

"Now, you're refusing to communicate with her?" she said angrily.

"I don't want to know anything about her school, Kathryn. I never wanted her to go there, and I don't think I ever will. You can tell me if she is alright, and that is all I need to know," then he turned over in bed and went to sleep. Kathryn managed to fall asleep too, soon afterwards.

As David heard his wife settle into sleep, he quietly got up. He knew Kathryn would not wake—she was a very deep sleeper. He walked into the living room and turned on a lamp and sat on the couch, holding the letter in his hand. It wasn't true that he just needed to know how she was. He needed to know every detail about everything that happened, but he couldn't tell Kathryn that. She wouldn't understand his need to keep himself away from wizards as much as possible, yet at the same time his need to follow his child's every move in the wizarding world—he didn't fully understand it all himself. He opened the letter and read it through twice.

"A special talent," he whispered to himself and remembered something that had happened when she was five.

The three of them were at the London Zoo and Kathryn, who was very pregnant at the time, had gone to the bathroom, while David and Courtney entered the reptile house. They were looking at a brightly colored copperhead, when it moved closer to the glass to look at them.

Courtney had giggled and then waved at the snake and said, "Hello."

David froze as he heard the hiss come out of her mouth. No! She could not have inherited that, he thought to himself. The snake answered back to Courtney, "Hello, little one." Courtney had giggled again, before David picked her up and hurried out of the reptile house.

David shook himself and replaced the letter on the kitchen table. He refilled the water bowl for Rex and then went to sleep.

A/N: Hehe! Sorry I couldn't get this out sooner. Yesterday night I went to a Reader's theatre production for my German class, and then I went to a friends house and hung out there with my sister and her husband and a few other friends until Voyager ended (last night's was a really good episode!—sorry, I love Star Trek).

Don't Forget To Review!

## A Project

Angela and Courtney were both late to breakfast the next morning due to how late they had gone to bed. As they rushed over to the table Professor McGonagall passed them their time-tables. As Courtney grabbed a muffin and started buttering it, Angela gazed over her schedule.

“Oh, great. Today I have Mum first. Then Muggle studies, that means you have Mum back to back for two periods. Then there’s lunch and after Double Charms.”

“Double charms?” Courtney asked.

“Means we have it twice as long with another house—looks like we have Charms with Ravenclaw. Hurry up, we shouldn’t be late first day of school.”

Courtney examined her schedule briefly before gulping down some pumpkin juice and followed her friend out of the Great Hall.

“Welcome to History of Magic. In this class, you will learn about the history of our society.” Professor Granger said after taking attendance, “This term you will also be doing a history project on any witch or wizard you choose. I expect your witch or wizard to be chosen by next class. Now, since I don’t want everyone to do the same person, it is on a first-come first-serve basis. If you want to do your project on Harry Potter, write me a paragraph on why you want to do your project on him and I will judge the best reason.” Then she launched into a semi-interesting lecture about the forming of the British Ministry of Magic.

Courtney groaned as she flexed her hand. Her muscles were cramped from writing a ton of notes in Professor Granger’s class. As Angela packed up her things to leave class and go to Muggle studies Courtney said, “Meet you at lunch?”

“Oh, no, sorry. I’m eating lunch with Mum today. She asked me to come to her rooms,” Angela apologized, “but we’ll see each other in Charms.”

“Oh, ok.” Courtney answered as Angela left for her next class.

As other muggle-borns filed into the classroom Professor Granger erased what she had written on the board and started to put new notes up. When everyone had entered she closed the door and walked over to the front of her desk and, leaning against it, addressed the class.

“In this class you will get an introduction to the Wizarding world. We’ll cover recent history and current events as well as giving you a background in the current pop culture of the wizarding world.

“The first thing that we will study will be the First and Second Dark Wars, as they have been the major factors in development of the Wizarding world as it exists now.

“This class will have very little homework, you’ll have less than your fellow students in Muggle Studies, because you have the advantage of being immersed in the wizarding world so you will learn this information quicker.

“I am a muggle-born myself so I know how confusing some things can be when you first enter the wizarding world, so if you have a question, just ask.”

“Now,” Hermione sighed and launched into lecture-mode, “the First Dark war started in 1971 with the rise of Voldemort. We’ll go into the history of Voldemort later, but right now you just need to know when it started. Voldemort quickly gained followers, whom he called Death Eaters. Voldemort’s goal was to eliminate Muggle-born witches and wizards, as well as half-bloods, and then attack the muggle world itself. Many scholars have compared Voldemort to Hitler.

“Voldemort commenced a series of attacks between 1972 and 1981 that decimated those who opposed him. Albus Dumbledore led the forces that opposed him. Hogwarts ran normally as a school but it doubled as the headquarters for the Order of the Phoenix, the ruling body of the Light Forces.

“Voldemort fell in October of 1981. Exactly why it happened is mostly still a mystery. Voldemort had made the Potter family his main target at the time. A spy among Voldemort’s forces reported this fact to Albus. Lily and James Potter along with their infant son Harry went into hiding use a charm called the Fidelius Charm. The charm hid their whereabouts from Voldemort by hiding it in one person. The secret keeper betrayed the Potters and Voldemort attacked them. Lily and James Potter were killed, but Voldemort’s curse ricocheted off Harry Potter and struck Voldemort. Voldemort did not die, but he was thrown from his body and lost most of his powers.

“Lily Potter died for Harry and so it is presumed that her sacrifice partially shielded him from the curse. However, there have been many instances in the past of people making the same type of sacrifice, where the other person still died, so there had to be something else about Harry Potter that prevented the curse from killing him. Nobody else has ever survived the killing curse.

“After Voldemort fell, the wizarding world as a whole decided to pretend it had never happened. This was unfortunate because Voldemort was not, in fact, dead. Had more been done following his fall, it might have prevented him from ever returning. Voldemort returned in 1994. That was the beginning of the Second Dark War, which lasted until 2005.

“One of Voldemort’s followers helped him gain a new body. To gain that body he used blood from Harry Potter, who was then almost fifteen. Voldemort commenced attacking the wizarding world with more ferocity than during his first reign. The attacks were brutal, it was a very dark time in my life, as well as well as the lives of most of the other professors. Many family members were lost. Voldemort was finally defeated for good in 2005, right at the gates of Hogwarts.

“This is a brief history, and we will be going into further depth later. Right now, does anyone have a question?”

A girl from Hufflepuff raised her hand, “Who finally defeated Voldemort?”

“Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore together.”

A boy from Ravenclaw raised his hand and, once the professor had acknowledged him, asked “One of the guys in my room was saying that Harry Potter disappeared years ago. Where is he?”

Hermione sighed, she knew this question would come up, it always did.

“Harry Potter has not been seen in sixteen years. He left the wizarding world after the final battle after he and the Headmaster killed Voldemort once and for all.”

“Why did he leave?” asked the same Hufflepuff girl who had asked who had defeated Voldemort.

“Harry Potter was accused and convicted of a crime when he was fifteen. He was sent to Azkaban. Azkaban is a wizard prison situated on an island and it is guarded by aurors.\* When Dumbledore’s spies heard that Voldemort was planning on attacking Azkaban, Harry Potter was moved back to Hogwarts. That was in 2005. A few months later, he was proven innocent when he helped Albus defeat Voldemort.

“Harry Potter left the wizarding world after that. He had spent ten years in prison for a crime he did not commit.

“The justice system has been completely overhauled because Harry Potter was not the first person to be sent to prison for a crime he didn’t commit. You remember I told you about the Potter’s secret keeper? Well, the man everyone thought was the secret keeper was actually framed for thirteen murders and sent to Azkaban. He broke out after twelve years and was proven innocent in 1995.”

A Slytherin boy raised his hand, “Who are all these people? Like the spy, the secret keeper and the one who everyone thought was the secret keeper?”

Hermione sighed, neither Sirius nor Severus would like this, but the children would find out anyway, “The spy was Severus Snape, your Potions teacher. The secret keeper was named Peter Pettigrew, he

was killed in battle in 1999. The man who everyone thought was the secret keeper, and who spent twelve years in Azkaban, was Sirius Black, your Defense Against the Dark Arts professor.”

After answering a few more questions, Hermione dismissed the students to lunch. She slowly made her way to her rooms, where Angela was supposed to meet her. Once again, she contemplated what it meant to teach the children a skewed history.

Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it. The phrase rang in her mind.

Sirius had been the most vocal against the idea of softening the story for the children, but eventually, even Sirius had caved in. They were protecting the younger generation.

A voice in the back of her head said softly, no, you’re too ashamed to admit your mistakes.

Hermione shook her head and picked up her pace as she neared her quarters.

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Courtney sat in the library at lunch, researching Harry Potter. She wanted to learn more about him, not just because of what she had learned that day, but because of her wand core.

She found it strange that there was almost nothing in the library about him.

She recalled that the Professor had told her in Diagon Alley that Harry Potter had been framed for murder, yet she had not stated this fact in class, nor did any of the books she could find indicate this. She sighed and opened yet another book. It didn’t make sense! If Harry was as great as they claimed, then why would he completely leave the wizarding world, just because he had been sent to prison? Of course, that was horrible, but you weren’t tortured in jail.

Or at least not in muggle jails. The thought brushed past her thoughts and she sat bolt upright in surprise, was that the reason? Had something happened to Harry Potter in prison, that it was impossible for him to remain in the wizarding world? But what? Professor Granger had indicated nothing of the sort.

Well it wouldn't be too far fetched to assume they hadn't told the whole truth-the library's suspicious lack of information concerning Harry Potter was testimony enough that they were trying to hide something.

She sighed and closed her book. Perhaps there would be something in the newspaper archives. She examined editions that were older than herself and, to her frustration, found a few editions not archived. They were editions from winter and early spring of 1995, and from late spring 2005. Probably, she reasoned, the precise periods when Harry Potter had been arrested and exonerated.

The bell clanged startling her and she hissed in annoyance as she grabbed her books and ran to charms.

Professor Weasley raised an eyebrow as she came clamoring into the classroom, "Glad you could join us Miss Barnes, have a seat. I won't take points off this time, but I will next time you're tardy."

All of the Gryffindors breathed in relief as Courtney nodded embarrassed and sat next to Angela. They proceeded to then learn the Levitation charm- Wingardium Leviosa.

After class she and Angela walked back to the Gryffindor Tower discussing their first day.

"So why were you late to Charms?" Angela finally asked.

"I lost track of the time in the library."

"What were you doing in the library one the first day of school?" her friend asked pointedly.

“I was looking up some stuff for my project for your mother’s class!” Courtney defended herself.

Angela rolled her eyes and simply answered, “Mum’s going to love you.” Then she started talking about her muggle studies class and all the fascinating things she had learned.

“And guess what! Muggles have this thing called the inner-net that they use to communicate and find information. Professor Creevey was telling us about it! Do you have an inner-net?”

Courtney giggled at Angela’s enthusiasm and then answered, “It’s the internet, not inner-net. And of course I have the internet at home. Everyone does. My laptop in my room has a wireless connection and I have a webcam to go with it.”~

She had lost Angela with her first sentence and so she had to explain what a laptop, a wireless connection, and a webcam all were.+

Angela was very excited about all of it and continued asking questions as they went to dinner.

After dinner they both sat down in the common room to work on their homework. “So who are you doing for your project?” Angela asked as she flipped through her Wizard’s Compendium of Famous and Infamous Persons, trying to get an idea.

“Um...well, I want to do my project on Harry Potter.”

Angela snorted, “Good luck. Everyone wants to do him.”

Her tone of voice surprised Courtney.

“Why do you say it like that? Do you not like Harry Potter?”

Angela sighed, “I don’t get what the big deal is. I mean he didn’t defeat Voldemort the first time and he only helped the headmaster the second time. Then he just disappears making everyone miserable, creating a big fuss.”

“‘Making everyone miserable’? What do you mean by that?” Courtney asked, confused.

Angela sighed again and turned her full attention to Courtney, “Mum and Dad both knew Harry Potter. Mum won’t tell me anything about how well they knew him, but it was obviously quite well because every time she talks about him she looks like she’s about to cry. I don’t like her crying and it is Harry Potter’s fault she does.”

Courtney nodded thoughtfully, filing this information away with the rest of her admittedly limited knowledge of Harry Potter.

The next morning, even though she didn’t have history for another two days, Courtney handed Professor Granger a slip of parchment with a few sentences on it explaining why she wanted to do her project on Harry Potter.

As I am Muggleborn (it read) and have very little background knowledge about the wizarding world, I wish to do my history project on Harry Potter as he has obviously been a central figure in recent history. Secondly, since everyone seems to think it so strange/amazing/wonderful that my wand is brother to his I was planning on finding out more anyway, I may as well get credit for it in class.

Courtney had almost put down a third reason-to fill in the suspicious gaps in the books she had read, but restrained herself thinking that perhaps they would forbid her to do it if she told them she suspected they were keeping secrets.

When she entered the history classroom for the next class, she was nervous. Would she be able to do the project she wanted?

“Alright class, please turn in your project proposals. At the end of class I will tell you who has what assignment. Today you will be reading chapter two out of your text while I look through your parchment.”

The class groaned when she told them they would just be reading that period, until she said casually, “or you could take a pop quiz...” there was a flurry of books and pages.

Courtney distractedly read the chapter-not even realizing that it was about Wizarding Law-as she thought about whether or not she would be able to do her project on Harry Potter.

She didn’t even stop to think why it had become such an obsession- why she cared so much about it.

“Ok class, only a few of you will get your first choice. Kyle Hall, you’ll have to choose a different wizard, Katie Corcoran asked for Merlin first. Caleb you too will have to choose another wizard, Angela requested Victor Krum first. And Gary Patil, Henry Brooks and Megan Stratford, you will all have to come up with a different proposal, Courtney Barnes got Harry Potter.”

Courtney could barely restrain herself, she felt like leaping up and shouting triumphantly.

The other three looked disappointed, but not devastated, unlike Caleb who was shooting murderous glances at his cousin.

Who was Victor Krum? Courtney wondered as Megan raised her hand and asked who had gotten Harry Potter in the other classes.

Professor Granger sighed and answered, “Well, I’ve only had my Ravenclaws so far-Charlie Longbottom got it in there.”

Courtney tried to recall what Charlie Longbottom looked like-she remembered a short-somewhat oriental- boy. She remembered Angela telling her that he was the youngest of three-the older two of which were both on the Ravenclaw Quidditch team.

As class ended, Hermione called to Courtney. When the rest of the students had left the professor addressed her.

“I am glad you have such an interest in Harry Potter, but since you are Muggleborn and don’t know, I should tell you this. I know Angela

is planning on writing to Viktor Krum and get a personal interview and many other students whose subject matter is still alive are planning on doing something similar. I recommend you not try to contact Harry. He doesn't take kindly to any contact with the wizarding world," Hermione paused a moment as if deciding to say her next thought or not, but then continued, "Before he left he warned that anyone who tried to contact him would be sorry. Many have found out the hard way."

Courtney was curious, what had happened, and so she asked, "What do you mean by that?"

Hermione sighed, "Eleven years ago I wrote to him, he didn't answer. Five years ago I wrote again and he did answer. He didn't write a letter, he sent me two curses. One that made it impossible for me to talk for two weeks and the other that made it impossible for me to use my hands properly for a month. So you see, I recommend you not write him, the consequences are not fun."

Courtney carefully filed this information away for future retrieval and nodded thanks to her teacher before heading off to her next class.

The entire next week Courtney could hardly concentrate in her other classes because she had become so involved in finding out anything and everything about Harry Potter. She found out the names of some people who had known him on the Gryffindor Quidditch team- Oliver Wood, Katie Bell, Alicia Spinnet all obligingly wrote her letters of what they remembered of Harry. She asked Angela if it would be wise to approach her parents and Angela begged her not to, because it would upset her mother. Courtney finally agreed and instead tried to set up a time to talk to the headmaster and some of the other teachers.

The Muggle Studies professor-Dennis Creevey- was particularly helpful to her in providing a picture or two of Harry from his early teens.

The first time Courtney glanced at one of the shots she gasped at the black hair and green eyes of the boy with a scar on his forehead. The facial structure was different, as was the body build, but there

was a strange resemblance between Harry Potter and her little brother.

Still though, Courtney was not satisfied. She was not getting the information she wanted. There were gaping holes. Courtney found it rather odd that no one else seemed to be aware of this fact. Then she realized that the students who grew up in the wizarding world couldn't see it because it had always been that way and the Muggleborn students didn't care enough.

But Courtney wanted answers.

A clue came by accident one evening while she was in the library doing some research on magical beasts and their properties as they pertained to potions. In one of her texts- Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them-she came across the entry for lethifolds. They had no use in potions and, infact, seemed to have no practical use at all. However, she was puzzled as she read the entry detailing how it was discovered that the Patronus charm could drive away the beast.

What did the Patronus do? What was it originally used for, if not specifically developed for use against the lethifolds?

She found a book on advanced defenses and looked up the Patronus in the glossary for a short description.

Patronus Charm:

Incantation: *Expecto Patronum*

Note: This is an extremely difficult spell to learn. Many adult witches and wizards have trouble casting this charm.

The Patronus was developed for defense against one of the darkest creatures known to wizardkind-the dementor. The Patronus forms a shield of good between the castor and the dementor, rendering the dementor's powers useless and sending it fleeing. The difficulty in this spell comes from both the amount of power it requires and the force of will it requires....

The short paragraph went on for a few more sentences and then gave a reference to what page and volume in such-and-such series more information could be found on. Courtney closed the book, confused. She had never heard of a dementor.

She scoured her defense books and came up with a few references to other books. Unfortunately, only one was a book not in the restricted section. She decided that was better than none and went and found the book in question- Facing your Fears and Worst Memories.

The book focused on defending yourself against boggarts-which they had learned the basics of in defense already, and dementors.

She quickly skimmed the pages on dementors until a paragraph on the history of Dementors in Britain caught her eye.

Since the defeat of Grindlewald the dementors, who served that Dark Lord have been used to guard Azkaban and the worst criminals of the wizarding world.

Courtney quickly flipped to see when the book had been published- 2003.

She then read what exactly the dementors did to a person. This was definitely information that was being kept hidden from the students. Dementors made people relive the worst moments of their lives. To be guarded by them...she shuddered. It would be torture! It would be maddening!

She sucked in her breath as she realized she had just found the answer. It wasn't that Harry Potter was angry because he had been falsely accused and imprisoned-it was the fact that the prison was torture for him! He had felt betrayed because he had been in the worst possible misery for ten years!

But why hide this? She suddenly wondered, Why was it so important that no one know what really happened to Harry?

The answer popped into her head before she had pondered too long, Society didn't want anyone to know how awful it could be to its own.

It reminded her of something she had heard, she wasn't sure it was true or not. After World War Two the Germans had refused to tell the younger generation of what had happened during the war. They had not wanted their children to know about the Concentration Camps, and their own barbarity.^

She sighed. She knew she was on the right track with this latest research. She confirmed it when she realized that none of the books on Azkaban mentioned anything besides Aurors guarding it. It was only one obscure reference in a book on the dementors themselves that tipped her off. No wonder no one else knew. Other people had of course read that book, but that sentence would have meant nothing to someone not so focused on the story of Harry Potter.

Closing the books and re-shelving them all she gathered her things and headed back to the Gryffindor tower, wondering what to do now. She needed the whole story and she knew she would not get it from the people she had already talked to-she wouldn't have been surprised if there was a law against telling the truth in this matter.

That night she couldn't sleep. She sat up thinking, and finally she came up with a solution and dropped off to sleep.

The next morning she awoke early-despite her late bed time- and wrote a letter, disregarding Professor Weasley's advice.

Dear Mister Potter,

My name is Courtney Barnes. I'm a first year at Hogwarts...

\*Hermione isn't exactly lying here. Aurors now guard Azkaban, but they don't tell the children that when Harry was there it was guarded by Dementors. This is pretty much what the entire wizarding world teaches, to all children, not just muggle-borns.

~Well, I really have no clue how technology will have advanced in twenty years, but hey, phones have been around for more than 100

years and we still have them don't we? I guess the internet can last thirty.

+Yes, Angela has inherited her Grandfather Weasley's love of anything Muggle and she has not been raised exposed to the muggle world because Hermione has not been in much contact with the muggle world herself.

^I mean no offense with this. I am not even sure it is true or not-I think I remember hearing something like that once upon a time. If this passage offends you I apologize. If you feel the need to correct me, please do so.

## The Letter

David scowled as he saw the owl flying towards him. He was eating lunch in the park when he caught sight of the bird. He knew it would be a letter addressed to Harry Potter. He could not completely stop owls addressed to that name from finding him, the best he could do was cast a spell around his house itself that confused any owl carrying a letter for Harry Potter. However, once he was off his own property, the owls could find him without trouble.

The bird dropped the letter on the table beside him and then ruffled his feathers and perched on a branch overhanging the picnic table.

Don't they ever give up? David thought in anger. It had been about six months since he had last received a letter addressed to his alter ego. And that was the longest period in the past sixteen years without letters.

He opened the letter determined to make the person who dared speak to him pay. His eyes widened though as he read the contents of the letter.

Dear Mister Potter,

My name is Courtney Barnes. I am a first year at Hogwarts. In our history class we have been assigned a project on a figure in history-I chose you. I should probably explain my reason for this. I am a Muggleborn witch and so I really don't know all that much about the wizarding world. Professor Granger gave us a summarized history, but I like details. Plus, I found out that my wand has the same core that your wand has.

Professor Granger warned me against writing to you and so I am prepared for an unpleasant reply from you, but I thought it was better to write you instead of not. You see, only you can give the information I need. Everyone in the wizarding world is hiding the truth from me about you. I'll tell you what I learned and hopefully, you can tell me the whole truth.

You were born to Lily and James Potter. They died when you were one year old. Lord Voldemort killed them and tried to kill you, but something about your mother's sacrifice for you made the curse bounce off of you and back onto Voldemort.

I don't really know anything about how or where you grew up or even what house you were in at Hogwarts, the professors all seem to avoid any topic centering around you.

When you were fifteen Voldemort returned. He was defeated in 2005, when you were 25. Professor Granger said you helped Headmaster Dumbledore defeat him once and for all. You were accused of murder when you were fifteen-though I only know this because Professor Granger told me right after I purchased my wand-none of the books about you mention that it was murder you were framed for. You were sentenced to life in Azkaban.

I know almost nothing about Azkaban-in fact until yesterday I didn't know that dementors once guarded the prison. Nobody in my generation knows. They told us that Aurors guard the prison-making no indication that it was not always that way.

I guess they soften it for us, but I don't understand it. I think it does more harm than good. I have a friend who kind of detests you because of the reaction anything about you gets from her mother. She doesn't understand why you were hurt so much when you were wrongly accused and convicted of a crime because she doesn't know how torturous it must have been. Of course I don't either. But I have a better idea than most of those my age.

I apologize for writing to you when I know you don't want to be contacted. It's just, I want to know the truth and nobody else will give it to me.

Thank you for reading this and I hope to receive some answer from you.

Sincerely,

Courtney Barnes.

Lunch now long forgotten, David stared at the letter, completely at a loss as to what to do. The letter sat there taunting him with his daughter's handwriting. Her naïve desire to know the truth.

Well, he wouldn't write back. Of course not. What would everyone think? Harry Potter replying civilly to a letter after sixteen years. He'd be swamped with owls! But he couldn't curse her either! That was unthinkable. So he would simply ignore the correspondence.

Kathryn's words came back to him. So now you're refusing to communicate with her?

He still refused to openly read Courtney's letters. He and Kathryn had not been on the best of terms for the past month. She was confused and he was adamant. She was hurt and he was afraid. He couldn't tell her the truth, the past. It would undermine all he had achieved in the past sixteen years.

As he slowly finished his lunch his eyes drifted back over the letter.

Could he just ignore her?

He had to!

But...he longed to talk with his daughter, to become part of her life again. He couldn't do that as David Barnes without revealing the truth.

But maybe....

Could he possibly become part of her life as Harry Potter?

Was it worth the risk?

He remembered the first time he held her as an infant. Her remembered when she first learned to talk. He remembered the pictures she used to draw for him. He remembered when she had come running to him after scraping her knees. He remembered the excited expression on her face as she spoke of Diagon Alley.

He remembered the hurt look in her eyes when he had told Sirius that he didn't want magic in his home. He remembered the desperate look on her face when he had walked out of the hotel room a few hours before Hermione had picked her up.

He remembered that the last letter had only been addressed to Michael and Kathryn.

No he couldn't hurt his daughter again. And if David Barnes couldn't bare the thought of writing to his child, then Harry Potter couldn't bare the thought of disappointing her.

He sighed and looked at the owl. "Meet me back here for lunch tomorrow," he said as he stood.

The owl hooted, apparently understanding and flew off to find a night-perch.

That evening, after Kathryn and Michael had already gone to bed he sat down at the computer to type out a reply.

It had been a week since Courtney had written to Harry Potter. She nervously awaited some response. She hadn't told anyone, not even Angela, that she had written to Harry Potter.

At breakfast she was cramming for a quiz they were supposed to have in Charms that day when an envelope dropped right into her scrambled eggs. She grumbled and glared at the owl that had delivered it and then her eyes widened in surprise as she recognized the school owl she had used to send the letter to Harry Potter.

She stuffed the letter into her backpack and ran from the hall—leaving her breakfast half finished. She quickly entered the closest classroom and shut the door behind her in order to open the envelope in private.

She had no clue what to expect and so wanted to answer in private. She carefully opened the envelope and to her surprise she found two pages of folded printer paper.

She eagerly opened them and found a letter addressed to her.

Dear Miss Barnes,

No doubt you are wondering why I am replying to your letter. Well, I'll just say: Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

I was astonished to say the least to read your letter. I have had nothing to do with the wizarding world for sixteen years and I really have no wish to be involved now, especially since you have told me how they have managed to deceive themselves into thinking they can gloss over the past.

To tell you the truth I am angry at some of the things they have taught you. But then, I have not been entirely truthful to anyone since I left the wizarding world. Okay I can face facts, I have not been at all truthful to anyone. My own wife is unaware of my past.

Congratulations, you are the first person to know that Harry Potter is married.

I guess I will start by telling you about my life growing up. After my parents were killed I was sent to live with my maternal aunt and her husband. I grew up without parental affection, without an adult mentor in my life. My aunt and uncle despised me and tried their hardest to put out the last spark of magic in me.

They knew I was a wizard, but they never told me. I didn't find out until my eleventh birthday-July 31, 1991. Rubeus Hagrid came and found me and told me the truth-my past, my powers, everything.

I was overjoyed. I went to Hogwarts with dreams of what life might be like with friends. And I made friends.

I was sorted into Gryffindor, like yourself. However, the sorting hat wanted to put me in Slytherin, I begged it not to.

I had a lot of good times and a lot of hard times at Hogwarts. I survived, however, because I had my friends. I gained a Godfather

when I was thirteen who became a father figure to me. For the first time in my life I learned to trust those around me.

Rubeus Hagrid was the first person who was ever kind to me or told me I was worth something. I loved him above all others because of that.

It was Hagrid whom I was accused of murdering.

Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger were my best friends. For the most part we were inseparable. We had our squabbles, but we were always there for each other when it mattered most. I had the wildest adventures with them, but I always knew it would be okay because we were together. I have enclosed a picture of the three of us together that was taken during Christmas of our fifth year. It was one month before I was framed.

I'm not sure if you can handle the entire truth Courtney, what will it do to you, to find out what this world that you have embraced can do? How cruel it can be?

I hesitate to tell it to you. I remember Dumbledore once saying to me that the truth was a wonderful and beautiful thing that should be treated with caution. I think that is the only thing that I still agree with him on.

Are you sure you want to know? I await your reply.

Sincerely,

Harry Potter.

Courtney stared in utter astonishment at the letter and the accompanying picture of the trio. She hadn't dared hope for anything even remotely similar to this.

But there it was, a reply from Harry Potter, with an invitation to continue, no less!

She realized belatedly that she had heard the bell ring signaling the start of class a few minutes before.

She ran out of the room and to Charms.

Professor Weasley had already handed out the quizzes when she got there. He took five points from Gryffindor and gave her a detention, but nothing could dampen her spirits that day.

Authors note:

If anyone thinks Harry is too open in the letter, I think it works because he has separated himself from it. As David Barnes he can't do anything for fear of revealing the past. However, he has managed to convince himself that being Harry Potter in the letter will keep him separated from the past, because he is now David Barnes and not Harry Potter, while at the same time fulfilling his wish to remain part of Courtney's life, but ignoring the fact that she has no knowledge that he is her father. It might not make a lot of sense logically, but whoever said the human heart was logical? This is just the way he has rationalized his actions and emotions in order to retain part of his sanity.

## Sharing the Memories

David entered the small storage unit he had rented for the past sixteen years. For a long minute he stared at the possessions. The trunk, covered in dust. His Firebolt in one corner of the small space. One box he knew contained all his old school clothes. Another held his old text books. Still another contained old tests, notes, and homework.

Finally, he sat down heavily on his old school trunk. In his hand, he held Courtney's reply to Harry Potter.

He was afraid to open it. Afraid she would want to know the truth. Afraid she wouldn't.

He glanced at his watch. He had received two unexpected appointment cancellations so he had a good three hours before anyone would need him. He had some time. He made sure his pager was on as well as his cell phone and then opened the letter.

Dear Mr. Potter,

I thank you for your prompt and polite reply to my inquiries.

To answer your question, I want to know. I have no doubt that it is horrible. I have no doubt that it is cruel.

But do you think wizards are the only ones who can be cruel? As I said before I am a Muggleborn. I have seen cruelty in the Muggle world that would match anything in the wizarding world. A few summers ago, my family went on a vacation to America. While in Washington D.C. we visited the Holocaust museum there.

I got sick and threw up after being there. But I do not regret having gone. I think the goals of museum apply on a smaller scale to what happened to you. The past must be remembered. It must be examined and discussed for its implications on the present. I need to know in order to act as a responsible citizen of the magical world.\*

That said, I hope you will tell me your story. Even if you do not feel comfortable now sharing it, I thank you for what you have told me so far.

I await your response.

Sincerely,

Courtney Barnes

David read the letter twice remembering the occasion to which Courtney was referring. She really had thrown up after the museum tour. Both he and Kathryn had been very sorry, fearing that they should have waited until she was older. Now she was saying she was glad she had gone.

David put the letter back in his pocket and thought for a few minutes. Then he slowly stood up and turned around to open his old trunk.

He rummaged through it looking for a few pictures, items and documents and, once he had found them, pulled out his old parchment and ink and quill sets.

It took him a moment to remember how to use a quill and inkwell (he was surprised that the ink hadn't dried up but then figured it must have been bespelled), soon enough it came back and he composed his reply.

~~\*\*~~

Courtney grumbled as she received her grade back on her Charms quiz. How was she supposed to remember the charm was Wingardium Leviosa and not Wingardium Leviosia? There was practically no difference between the two! She stuffed the quiz in her bag and trudged to History of Magic.

"Hello everyone! Today we are having a surprise assessment." Professor Granger said when all the students were seated. "I want you to take out parchment and write exactly what you have found out so far about the person you decided to study." There were many

groans but she just continued, "All of you should have at least found out a few things. It can just be a list of facts, or a full paragraph. I want to know you have been working on your project."

Courtney froze. What was she supposed to write? Everything she had found out so far was stuff she shouldn't know. She certainly didn't want to give away that she had a correspondence with Harry Potter!

In the end, she simply resorted to writing down what the Professor herself had said about Harry Potter in their first lesson. She didn't remind the professor that she already knew Harry had been framed for murder. Quickly writing it down she turned it in and sat reading until the other students finished. After Professor Granger collected everyone else's parchment, she launched into a lecture about the founding of the International Confederation of Wizards and its founding and why Liechtenstein had not wanted to be a member....

Courtney was glad when class ended. As nice and as good a teacher that Professor Granger was the subject still seemed to drag on forever.

She had some free time before dinner and so she put her things in her dormitory and went outside. It was a surprisingly warm afternoon. It was gradually getting colder and this was probably the last nice day they would have before winter took a hold. The early October breezes rustled the brown and red leaves.

Courtney made her way to her favorite spot: the back stoop of the old hut on the edge of the Forbidden Forest. Nobody else ever went back there. She wondered vaguely why the hut was there. It was old and abandoned-or at least she had never seen anyone inside-and, frankly, it was an eye sore. She shrugged to herself as she looked at a plot that could have once been a garden. An ancient dead stump with a large gouge in it, as though someone had just decided to bury an ax in the top, sat to the left of the garden just a few steps from the forest.

After twenty minutes she stood up and turned to the back door itself. She had yet to try and go in. Turning the handle she pushed open the door and walked in.

Light filtered through the windows casting a view on the dusty inside of the hut. It was only one room. A fireplace sat along one wall with a large black cauldron. A bed with a bare mattress was in a corner. A dresser stood beside it. A table and three chairs took most of the center of the room. Cabinets lined the wall above a water pump and sink.

An old rug sat by the front door. It looked like someone or something had worn it very thin.

She hivered at the untouched feeling of the hut; she felt like she was intruding in someone else's place. She walked back out the door and closed it.

Deciding it was now time to make it back up to the castle for dinner, she walked around the cabin. Rex fluttered over to her at that moment and presented her with a letter and a package.

Forgetting all about dinner she quickly untied the letter and package, thanked her owl quickly, and sprinted up to the Gryffindor Common Room where she eagerly opened the letter, setting the package aside until later. She was surprised to find it written out on parchment, on several sheets in fact.

Dear Courtney,

I will have to break up my story into several letters as it would be too long and take too much time to write it all at once.

As I told you before I lived with my aunt and uncle. Aunt Petunia was the sister of my mother, Lily Evans. I however could never see how they could be sisters. I suspect Petunia was always jealous that Mum was a witch and had powers while she did not. Uncle Vernon owned a company called Grunnings which made and sold drills. They had a son who was a few months older than me, named Dudley.

For ten years my bedroom was the cupboard under the stairs at Number Four Privet Drive. They didn't believe I was worthy of a real room, while Dudley got two.

I was never physically abused, but I was neglected and belittled.

A few weeks before I turned eleven I started receiving strange letters addressed in green ink. Vernon kept destroying them and he kept me from reading...

The letter continued for pages chronicling the adventures during Harry's first year. She read about how Ron and then Hermione became his friends. She read about Hagrid's dragon Norbert (realizing finally that the old hut had been Hagrid's). She read about his confrontation at the end of the year.

In the envelope she also found a picture from his first Quidditch game, and his Hogwarts Letter in its original green addressed envelope.

By the time she finished reading, dinner was over and people were drifting back into the tower. She quickly stuffed the package into her bag so no one else would pick it up.

"Courtney? Why weren't you at dinner?" Angela asked.

"I got a letter. I wanted to read it."

"Well, aren't you hungry?"

Courtney's stomach gave a rumble and, laughing, she nodded.

"Come on then, Dad showed me how to get to the kitchens. The house-elves will be able to give you something."

Courtney followed her friend down to a portrait of a fruit bowl. Angela tickled the pear and a door knob appeared.

Entering they were greeted by a squeal of happiness from an aging house-elf dressed in some very strange attire.

The elf had on a maroon sweater and yellow pants. A bright green knitted hat sat atop his head, he wore one red sock, and one sock

that had probably been black once upon a time but had been washed and patched so many times it was a multicolored gray.

“How can Dobby help the misses?” he squeaked.

“Courtney wasn’t at dinner Dobby, she needs something to eat.

Dobby bounced on the balls of his feet and snapped his fingers. Three house-elves rushed out of nowhere and in twenty seconds flat had a plate with a bowl of soup a sandwich and a glass of pumpkin juice in front of Courtney, who was seated at a table.

“And,” Angela said mischievously, “a little dessert for both of us?”

In eight seconds two slices of cheesecake sat on a table waiting for them. Courtney ate her meal while listening to Angela’s babble and when she finished it she and Angela both dug into their cheesecake.

“Thank you Dobby, thank you all!” Courtney said as she and Angela left the kitchen. They hurried back to the tower to make sure they made it before curfew.

Later that night Courtney carefully packed the letter in her trunk with the first letter she had received (forgetting about the package in her bag). She wrote down a few questions she had on a separate piece of parchment and then went to bed.

At breakfast the next morning, an unfamiliar owl delivered a letter to her. She glanced at the handwriting on the front and her eyes widened. It was another letter from Harry Potter. She opened it and started reading it surreptitiously under the table.

Dear Courtney,

I find myself unable to concentrate on the things I need to do at the moment so I may as well do something productive and write to you. Writing to you is difficult, reopening the memories that I buried years ago. However, to my own surprise, I find I cannot hate the world for what it was then. I cannot hate Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger for the children they were back then. Don’t get me wrong, I never

want to see their faces again. I never want to speak to them again. I have lived for sixteen years without them and I will live perfectly happily the rest of my life without them. And I still hate them for what they did to me, but I cannot hate the eleven-year-old Ron Weasley who sacrificed himself on a life-sized chessboard. I cannot hate the eleven-year-old Hermione Granger who cowered in the bathroom, terrified of a troll.

I am remembering what was good. I don't want to though. Or maybe I do. I don't even understand it myself.

Anyway, the summer before my second year was one of the worst ever, mostly thanks to an over enthusiastic house-elf named....

This letter was even longer than the first one. There was no way that Courtney could finish reading it before class started so she took it with her. She glanced ahead a little bit and noticed that this letter not only covered second year but also third year.

She continued reading during Defense against the Dark Arts while she was supposed to be reading up on the myths and truths about vampires.

Half-way through class Professor Black tapped her on the shoulder. Startled, Courtney gasped. Sirius Black beckoned for the letter with a finger and she had to relinquish it.

"Please stay after class." He said quietly so as not to disturb the other students.

Almost panicking at the thought of someone else reading one of her letters, Courtney couldn't focus on her text book. When the bell finally rang she almost had the urge to run out. But she knew she had to get the letter back.

When all the other students had left, Professor Black closed the door and motioned Courtney to move up to the desk closest to his own.

“When I give an assignment in class I expect students to follow my instructions. Ten points from Gryffindor, Miss Barnes.”

“Yes, sir.” Courtney said staring at where the letter lay on his desk. Vaguely she thanked her lucky stars that he had not taken points off of her in front of everyone else or that he had not made a spectacle of taking the letter away from her as some other teachers might.

“Might I ask what is so interesting in a letter that you could not wait to read it at a more appropriate time?” Evidently, he had only seen the header and first line at most.

Courtney squirmed, “It was from a friend.”

“How long has it been since you got a letter from this friend?” Professor Black asked.

Courtney mumbled her answer, knowing the professor would not be happy.

“I didn’t catch that,” he said patiently.

“A day,” Courtney said a little louder.

“I see. I will keep this for now,” he picked up the letter and put it in a drawer. He looked back up at her and, misinterpreting the expression on her face, said, “Do not worry, I am not in the habit of reading other people’s mail. You can have it back at the end of term.”

“But!”

“Miss Barnes, I suggest you get to your next class before you are too late.”

“I need that letter professor!” she said desperately.

Professor Black raised his eyebrows at her.

“I said you can have it back by the end of term. And if you really want to know what your friend said then write back and ask and tell about

your nasty old teacher who won't give it back. You should not have brought it to class Miss Barnes."

"But I can't ask him to write it all again! He might stop writing!" Courtney was close to tears.

Finally noticing how truly upset the girl was Professor Black said, "Calm down child. It is not the end of the world! What could possibly be this important?"

"I don't want to loose his trust Professor! I was so surprised when he replied to my letter that I didn't tell anybody in case he stopped."

"Who child? Is your father finally accepting the fact that you are a witch?" Sirius asked, remembering the statement of David Barnes the night he had come to explain the wizarding world to Courtney.

"No. Please, can I have the letter back?" she pleaded.

"Tell me why it is so important and I might."

"It's for my project for Professor Granger. You know on a witch or wizard. I need what is written in that letter for the project which is due before term ends."

Professor Black's face lost all color as he realized whom the letter had to be from. He knew Courtney Barnes had been the lucky student to get Harry Potter. The handwriting on the letter had been vaguely familiar. Her talk of trust and that 'he' might stop writing....

"You're writing to Harry Potter?" he whispered in a strained whisper.

Courtney nodded miserably.

Professor Black sat back staring at Courtney.

"H...how did you...?"

Courtney sighed and answered "I don't know why he decided to write me back. I just wrote to him out of desperation because there is no

information on his anywhere. They don't say why he was sent to Azkaban in any of the books. The only reason I know is because Professor Granger told me right after I got my wand. They don't even tell us about the dementors guarding Azkaban. I found that on my own. I decided to go straight to the source because it is obvious none of you will tell the truth." Courtney's eyes widened as she realized what she had just said to a teacher.

Professor Black, regaining a little color, considered her words and nodded slowly. Then he cleared his throat, "I will not tell anyone else Miss Barnes. If you have any questions, you are welcome to ask me. I promise you I will tell you the truth. If Harry is writing to you, I have no doubt he will tell all of it anyway. And," he picked up a piece of parchment and started writing on it, "these are books with some specific references to Harry containing information that I'm not sure Harry himself knows. In my file cabinet in my office I have a collection of newspapers from the period that I know are neither in the library nor available for ordering from the publisher. If you stop by my office on Saturday I will allow you to peruse them."

He handed her the list he had written and then opened the drawer and took out the letter. He gazed at it longingly for a moment and then handed it back to her.

"Miss Barnes," his voice was filled with emotion now, "I loved Harry and he trusted me. He didn't give trust easily, that came from his upbringing, and so when he gave you trust it was a big thing. I betrayed his trust, I betrayed the love he had for me. I betrayed the love I had for him. I betrayed the trust his parents placed in me. Harry was my entire life at the time and I shoved him away without a second thought. For some reason he trusts you Miss Barnes. Cherish that trust."

He cleared his throat, "I will inform Professor McGonagall as to why you missed her class today. Just make sure you get the assignment. Let me know when you'd like to come around to my office. I wish you the best of luck with this project Miss Barnes. A lot of people won't be pleased with what you find out, but I, for one, am proud of you."

Courtney nodded and left, stuffing the list into her bag along with the letter. Since, it seemed, Professor Black was excusing her from all of Transfiguration that day, she headed up to the tower to continue reading.

It took her almost an hour to finish the letter. By then class was over and it was well into lunchtime. When she finally folded the letter back up and examined the other contents of the envelope she only had twenty minutes before her next class.

The first thing she pulled out was a newspaper clipping from an evening edition of the Daily Prophet talking about the flying car Ron and Harry had taken to school their second year.

Then there were pictures. There were quite a few in this one. There was Angela's dad burping slugs, Harry with a boneless arm, a diary being picked up from a puddle of red ink, and a group shot of Harry, Ron, Hermione, Hagrid, and Ginny all from second year. There were even more from third year. A picture of Harry flying his Firebolt proudly, one with Hagrid and Buckbeak, Professor Lupin banishing some object, the Whomping Willow brandishing its branches until a cat ducked under and hit a knot and froze it, Christmas morning with everyone smiling and waving-wearing Weasley sweaters, and Ron jumping around trying exasperatedly to catch his owl in a train compartment.

The first letter Harry had received from Sirius was there as well as the permission slip he had signed to allow Harry to go to Hogsmeade.

Courtney hurriedly put all the pictures back into the envelope, put everything in her bag, and ran off to join the rest of her year-mates in Potions.

Double Potions that afternoon seemed to drag on forever. She managed to ruin her potion completely (though she didn't melt the cauldron, thank goodness) and get a zero for the day, but she didn't really care because she had just remembered the package that had arrived with the letter the night before. When class ended, she ran back up to her dorm and opened the package before anyone else could disturb her.

Out slid a smooth silvery Invisibility Cloak.

\*I have never had a chance to visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and that is to my shame because I grew up only two hours south of D.C. The information I know about the museum is from the website. What struck me is the goals of the museum, as described in the “For Students” section and that is what Courtney is referring to. This is what it said: “to remember those who suffered; and to reflect upon the moral, spiritual, and political questions raised by the events of the Holocaust, as well as to think about their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy.”

A/N. Grr, I re-read the letter to Harry and realized that Courtney really doesn't sound like an eleven year old. But I no longer remember what an eleven year old sounds like, so I guess she is just stuck sounding older in her letter...

Haha! Finally finished the chapter! Hope you liked it. You will see more of David in the next chapter. Sirius finally decided to cooperate and I found a way to get him in the chapter.

## Talking

Courtney found an opportunity to use her new invisibility cloak two days later. She had spent all evening working on homework for her other classes and had had no time to look at the books Professor Black had recommended. She wanted to look at them in private so no one would ask awkward questions. The next day was Saturday so she could sleep in, but it was past curfew. She slipped on the invisibility cloak and waited a few minutes by the opening. She knew at least two students would be returning from detentions soon. Sure enough five minutes later the portrait opened as a third year she couldn't quite remember the name of entered. She hurriedly climbed out of the common room before the girl could close the portrait behind her. From there, she walked quietly to the library.

Entering the silent room she proceeded to a back corner where she lit a candle on the wall. Then she lit her wand and took the list out of her pocket.

"The History of the Order of Merlin, that would be in the history section. Family Legacies, History again. Wizengamot Memberships: 2010-2015, same. And Modern Defensive Tactics and Theories, Defense section."

She first went to the History section and collected those books. Setting them on her table she went back over to the Defense section to find the last book, to her disappointment it was not there. She figured it was either checked out or in the Restricted section. Either way she had plenty else to look at for the time being.

She opened The History of the Order of Merlin first and turned to the table of contents. It contained a History and explanation for what the Order was and then had lists. Assuming that was what she wanted to look at she flipped to the lists and made her way to the 'P's.

"Ponder, Pondor, Pooket, Poole, Porsir, Porsimmon, Porsnippet, Porslin, Pos, Pose, Posarem, Posaret, Post, Postuvamu, Posumama, what weird names..., Potack, Potluck, Pott, Pottalamer, Potter, finally!" She moved her finger to the entry to read what it said.

“Potter, James awarded Order of Merlin Second Class awarded posthumously 1981, for services rendered during the First Dark War’. Huh? Oh! Wrong one.” She moved her finger down to the next entry.

“Potter, Harry awarded Order of Merlin First Class in absentia 2005 for the defeat of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and saving Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and her Headmaster and consequently the entire Wizarding World. Potter did not attend award ceremony. It was recommended that Potter receive the award of Merlin’s Staff. Decision pending. For more information on Merlin’s Staff, please refer to page 673.”

Her curiosity at why ‘James’ was before ‘Harry’ in a listing that was supposed to be alphabetic flew out of her head as she reread the entry.

“For the defeat of Voldemort? For saving the school, the headmaster and all of Wizarding Society? Well that is certainly not what Professor Granger said!”

She then turned to page 673 to find out what Merlin’s Staff was.

The distinction of Merlin’s Staff actually originated before Merlin’s time. It was called raajaadhiraaja meaning “overking of kings” in Sanskrit. It is the highest distinction possible in the Wizarding World. It originated in Ancient Egypt about 8000 BC (the original Egyptian title has been lost) and has been awarded only six times, the most recent being nine hundred years ago. It became known as Merlin’s Staff when Merlin himself (a recipient of the recognition) presented his staff to the next recipient of the recognition. (This is the only time that two recipients have ever been within each others’ life time.) Modernly, anyone named to the title is also the official leader of the International Confederation of Wizards.

In order for Merlin’s Staff to be awarded all wizarding governments throughout the entire world must unanimously agree to the appointment. In agreeing to the appointment, they also agree to recognize the individual as the supreme authority in all wizarding affairs. He (or she-though a woman has never been awarded the

distinction) supercedes the authority of whatever governments currently exist and whatever laws are standing. Most important, once the appointment is made (meaning as soon as a government approves it) it cannot be revoked. There are three ways in which Merlin's Staff may be removed-through death, through a self-declared act revoking his own appointment, or by a new person appointed to the position.

Each wizarding body must examine the set criteria and if they find the nominated individual meets the criteria they must go through with the appointment.

Albus Dumbledore was considered for the award but was disqualified on the grounds that Grindewald did not threaten the entire world. His appointment fell short by ten approvals.

Currently under review is the nomination of Harry Potter. So far, 183 governments have agreed to the appointment. The rest of the appointments are expected by the end of next year.

The first individual to hold the title....

Courtney's eyes widened. She hurriedly looked for the publication date. 2010.

Could Harry Potter hold the title Merlin's Staff and not know it?

Courtney shook herself and closed that book. She couldn't even comprehend someone being given that much power. She opened the Wizengamot book and scanned through the index until she found "Potter, Harry." Quickly turning to the page she read the entry.

Appointed Chief Wizard of the Wizengamot in 2012. However, Mr. Potter has never been present at a Wizengamot convening. While he is in absentia, Albus Dumbledore has been filling the position....

The article went on, giving no indication whether or not Harry had received the title.

She stuffed all the books in her bag and ducked back under her invisibility cloak and left the library. She'd read enough for one night.

~~\*\*~~

Nervously chewing on the end of her quill, Courtney tried to figure out the best way to tell Mr. Potter that Sirius knew of their.

She was having a considerably hard time. Especially since she had not been able to find out whether or not Harry had received all the nominations for Merlin's Staff. She was in the library again and it was Saturday afternoon.

"What are you working on so hard, Miss Barnes?" a voice said behind her.

Courtney jumped and turned to face her History teacher. "N-nothing. Just a letter."

Hermione raised her eyebrow and replied in a humorous tone, "In the library surrounded by history books?" Courtney again had the books she had taken the night before spread out on a table.

Courtney squirmed. "Can I do anything for you professor?" she asked.

"Actually I did want to talk to you about your project. I'm a little worried about that you seem to have trouble finding the information."

"Professor, the information you gave us in class is all the information given in any of the biographical sketches-in the Restricted Section or not. I checked the catalog. How am I supposed to find any information when it is as closely guarded as national security issues?"

Hermione sighed, every single student who did Harry Potter ran into this problem. The only reason she allowed Harry Potter projects at all was that she knew the students would mutiny if it were forbidden. Of course that always made her wonder why they were so obsessed with him when they concealed as much information as possible. She shook those thoughts from her head and addressed Courtney.

"Have you been able to find any information outside of what I told you?"

Courtney thought for a moment then nodded, she could share the information she had learned from the library books-but nothing from Professor Black or Harry himself.

"I found a reference indicating that while Harry Potter was in Azkaban, Dementors rather than Aurors guarded it. I also found that Harry was awarded the Order of Merlin First Class for the defeat of Voldemort-not just helping Dumbledore like you said-and saving Hogwarts, the Headmaster and the entire wizarding world. I found out that he was nominated for the title Merlin's Staff, but I haven't been able to find out if he was appointed. Do you know?."

Hermione's jaw dropped. None of her previous students had managed to unearth that information.

"Y-you've really done your research." And then the professor fairly ran out of the library.

Courtney giggled a little bit at the reaction, scowled that she still did not know about the appointment, and then started packing up her books in order to visit Professor Black's office and look at his newspapers.

~~\*\*~~

Tuesday afternoon David opened the latest letter from Courtney in anticipation. All previous hesitation had long since disappeared.

Dear Mr. Potter

First, I have a confession to make. I was reading your last letter in class and the teacher caught me. He took the letter and was going to keep it until the end of term. I ended up having to tell him about it to get it back. It was Professor Black. He knows we are in correspondence. However, he has promised me that he will tell no one. He has also offered to let me look at his old newspapers having to do with you.

He recommended some books to me that had some information about you. Did you know that you were awarded the Order of Merlin First Class? You are also currently the Chief Wizard of the Wizengamot. You were nominated for Merlin's Staff, but I can't find if you were ever appointed or not.

In another book called Family Legacies I found out that your mother was not technically a Muggle-born. She was the first witch after four generations of squibs on her father's side.

There is a book that mentions you, but I need to get into the restricted section to read that. Even with the invisibility cloak I am nervous about doing that.

Halloween is coming up and the entire school is allowed to visit Hogsmeade. I can't wait!

Courtney Barnes

David sat back thinking about what Courtney had said. Then he sighed and took out his latest letter (detailing the happenings of the TriWizard Tournament, which had been tremendously difficult to write) for Courtney and gave it to the owl (which was one of the school owls). As it flew away, he put the letter he had just received in his pocket and left the park to drive home.

Upon arriving he found that Courtney had evidently sent two letters at the same time: one to her family and one to Harry.

Kathryn was reading it to Michael. David simply ignored it as best he could and took off his tie. An uneasy peace had settled over the house over the past two or three weeks. Kathryn stopped confronting David about his reaction to anything magical and in turn David stopped reacting so harshly. He still didn't read the letters himself (at least publicly), nor did he contribute any type of reply, but he didn't leave the room anymore.

Dinner that night was filled with Michael's chatter about school and Kathryn talking about the class she had taught that day (she worked as a substitute teacher). After tucking Michael into bed Kathryn came down stairs and found her husband reading the evening paper. She

sat down beside him on the couch and took the paper out of his hand, "I need to talk to you," she said by way of explanation.

David nodded, smiling slightly.

"I got a letter today from the mother of one of Courtney's friends. She asked if we could get together sometime. I'd like to invite her over and get to know her better. She does not have any powers, but her husband does and so do her three children. Her youngest is Caleb is in Courtney's house. Her name is Megan Weasley. I want to meet her and become friends with her. I just want you to know I will be inviting her over to the house and doing things with her." Kathryn looked very closely for her husband's reaction.

He closed his eyes and then, without opening them, answered, "I will not stop you from encouraging Courtney or becoming more involved in the path she has chosen. I am not going to make decisions for you. I will be courteous to anyone you invite here Kathryn, but please do not ask me to accept it all. I am doing what I can."

Kathryn felt relief inside. It wasn't anywhere near what she wanted but it was more than she could have hoped for two months ago.

She kissed her husband and then announced that she was going to bed.

~~\*\*~~

The next morning Kathryn called the telephone number Megan Weasley had given her.

"Hello?"

"Megan? This is Kathryn. You wrote me a letter about getting together sometime. I'd really like that. I need to involve myself more in wizarding society."

"Are you free today?" came the answer.

"Yes, I am."

“Well then, would you like to come to Diagon Alley for the day? Fred, that’s my husband, is working there today, his Joke Shop gets a lot of business around Halloween, and I like to visit sometimes.”

“That sounds wonderful. I’d just have to be back by three to pick up my son after school.”

“Give me your address and we’ll be there in ten minutes.”

Kathryn did and then hung up.

True to her word, ten minutes later the doorbell rang. Kathryn opened it revealing a tall man with red hair and a multitude of freckles followed by a tall woman with brown hair. After quick introductions the three of them set off down the street.

“Where exactly are we going?” Kathryn asked.

“We’re using the nearest public floo. There’s one in the underground,” Fred explained, “From there we will floo to Diagon Alley.”

“Floo...that’s traveling by fire, right?” Kathryn said remembering Courtney’s first letter.

“Yes. It might be a little bit disorienting at first but it gets you there fast.” Megan said.

Entering the underground Fred led them to a turnstile far to the right of all the others that nobody else seemed to be using even though it was morning rush hour.

“It’s enchanted,” Fred explained quietly, “you can only see it because I am with you.” He fished around in his pocket and pulled out three silver coins he handed one each to Megan and Kathryn and then put his own coin in the slot. The turnstile moved and out of the chute where a token would normally come out there came a small bag. Fred picked it up and then calmly waited for the other two.

“You go ahead,” Megan said.

Kathryn moved to put her coin in the slot and promptly dropped it. Retrieving it, blushing all the while, she put it in correctly and pushed through the turnstile. She picked up the bag that came out and then looked around and gasped.

She could no longer see the rest of the underground station but instead found herself in a room with a big fireplace that she had not seen from the other side of the turnstile. Megan came into the room a moment later and the three walked straight to the fireplace.

“Megan, would you go first to show Kathryn?” Fred said.

Megan nodded and stepped into the fireplace. Opening the little bag she poured its contents to her feet. Kathryn’s eyes widened as she saw the green flames. “Diagon Alley!” Megan disappeared.

Kathryn stared apprehensively at the fireplace as Fred gave her a nudge.

“Don’t get nervous, just do what she did.” Fred encouraged.

Kathryn stepped into the stone structure and fumbled with the knot on the bag. Pouring it to her feet she was amazed at the feeling of the green flames tickling her legs. “Diagon Alley!” she enunciated clearly.

Suddenly she was spinning and spinning and spinning...and she really didn’t like it. When she started slowing down and finally stopped she fell right out of the fireplace and promptly threw up in the floor.

Mortified, but still feeling queasy as Megan helped her up, Kathryn tried to get the vomit taste out of her mouth.

Fred came through right then and promptly cleaned up the mess.

“You okay?” he asked.

"Yeah," Kathryn answered weakly, "I am just a klutz and I get motion sickness easily-evidently not a good combination for the floo."

Kathryn took a deep breath and felt a little better, especially after Fred conjured a glass of water for her to clean her mouth with. She looked around and discovered they were in a room consisting only of a fireplace and a few benches lining the walls. There was one door straight across from the fireplace.

They walked out the door and Kathryn found herself in a whole different world.

~~\*\*~~

Fred chuckled to himself as he watched his oldest child, Amanda age 21, walk out of the shop with Megan and Kathryn. The three were going to have a ball and he knew it. Megan loved the magical world and Kathryn seemed just as eager to see it as Megan had first been.

"Brian!" he called through the shop. His nineteen-year-old son was supposed to be here already.

"Yeah, Dad?" His son's voice came from the back room.

"You checked the mail yet?"

"Yes, two letters. I put them on the shelf under the cash register."

Fred retrieved the letters and sat on the counter to open them. The first one was a business opportunity to open a branch in South Africa. He smiled. George would be happy. His twin had been trying to get a foothold in Africa (the only place without a WWW Branch-which was unfortunate because the continent had a higher magical population per square mile than anywhere else) for the longest time but the people always seemed to like Witch Doctor Inc. a joke shop that had flourished for over one hundred years.

Too bad George was on duty today. They had an arrangement with the Ministry of Magic and Department of Mysteries-they would switch

off days. Fred had worked his MoM duty the day before so today he got to run the shop. Normally the Ministry wouldn't allow it, but being the top two Unspeakables in the place had its perks.

He set the first letter aside to show George later and opened the second.

~~\*\*~~

Brian whistled aimlessly to himself, thinking of the date he was going on that night with his girlfriend. He had a very special night planned.

He sighed and turned back to the inventory list. They needed to get more Canary Creams from the factory, they were running low and they had a lot of Owl Orders coming in.

As he turned to check their stock of Skiving Snackboxes he heard an indistinct yell from the main store room and popped his head out, "Dad?"

"You've got the front end!" his Dad yelled as he ran out the front door of the store leaving behind a very confused son.

~~\*\*~~

Fred panted as he jogged from his apparition point in Hogsmeade up to Hogwarts. His mind reeled. This was unthinkable!

He opened the doors of the school and hurriedly walked in. No one was in the entrance hall and so he started a brisk walk to the Headmaster's office. He didn't really know why he was here, but he was falling back on habit created during the war. When in doubt-go to Dumbledore.

He took out his wand and tapped it on the gargoyle's left hand pinky fingernail. The gargoyle hopped aside revealing the staircase. He didn't have time to guess the password and he knew the trigger taught to them by Dumbledore years before would still work.

He heard voices from within and raised his hand and knocked. The voices subsided and Albus' voice said, "Come in."

He opened the door to find the headmaster with Sirius and Hermione.

"Fred, good to see you!" Albus grinned merrily. Fred had never figured out how he always knew which twin was which when their own mother had never gotten it down perfect.

"Albus, Sirius, Hermione," Fred nodded to them. Then he broke off, unable to even tell them what had happened.

"Is there anything I can do?" Albus said after a moment of silence.

"I don't know! I...I am just very confused. Megan and Amanda are playing tour guide for Kathryn Barnes today. I was at the shop when I received a letter." Fred broke off again.

Sirius perked up, he knew that this had to somehow involve Courtney's correspondence with Harry.

"And?" Hermione said impatiently.

"The letter said...it was about...he wants me to...!" Fred stood and started pacing.

"Who was it from?" Albus asked, clearly puzzled as to why Fred reacted like this.

"Harry!" Fred burst out in a tone that clearly said pinch me to make sure I am not dreaming or hallucinating.

"Harry?" Hermione said confused.

"Harry Potter! It was a letter from Harry Potter!" Fred yelled.

Hermione froze staring at Fred. Albus went as white as his beard. Sirius didn't react nearly as strongly and, as such, was the only one able to articulate another question.

“What did it say?”

“He...he wants all of his ownership (including all the rights and privileges originally granted him) and earnings from the company to be immediately transferred to the ownership of Courtney Barnes and he wants it presented to her, in private, on Halloween when she is in Hogsmeade.”

Sirius' eyes widened in shock and he gripped the arms of his chair tightly. Even with the prior knowledge of the friendship between Courtney and Harry he had still never expected this!

“Harry still owned a share?” Hermione said faintly.

Fred nodded, “One third of the company, one third of the earnings, guaranteed lifetime supply of any inventory desired. And though he never used it, equal say to George and I in all company affairs.” Fred said this all in a very mechanical manner.

Albus, somehow, had managed to overcome his shock and said in a wondering tone, “How did he know she was going to be in Hogsmeade on Halloween? How does he know her at all?”

Hermione shook her head dumbly as Fred looked on, wondering what would happen next.

Sirius buried his head in his hands and groaned.

“Sirius?” Hermione asked.

Not lifting his head he answered, “Courtney has been in correspondence with Harry since the second week of September. He has been telling her everything.”

Hermione, quite unexpectedly, started crying.

“How do you know this?” Albus asked Sirius in a faltering tone that none of them had heard for years.

"I caught her reading a letter in class two weeks ago, I confiscated it. After class, she asked for it back. Eventually she had to tell me what it was for me to give it back to her. From what I saw of it he was telling her all about his second year.

Through her tears Hermione mumbled, "She received a letter at breakfast this morning, thick, a lot of parchment."

Silence reigned in the office as the four occupants gathered-or attempted to gather-their thoughts. Then Albus sighed and addressed Fred who was now sitting limply in a chair.

"I assume you came to me seeking advice?" Fred nodded mutely.

"I suggest you simply do as he asks. Don't tell anyone and do not attempt to contact Harry, unless he has asked for confirmation of the transaction?" Fred shook his head.

"Don't attempt to contact him!" Hermione squealed shrilly, "But this could mean he wants to return!"

Albus shook his head sadly, "I was informed immediately after breakfast that Mr. Charlie Longbottom was admitted to the hospital wing after an encounter with one of Harry's infamous replies. I cannot begin to understand why Harry has chosen to bring Courtney Barnes into his life, but we will leave him to it and not interfere. That much we can do for him after being helpless for so many years."

After a few minutes, there were nods from the other three. Then they all sat in silence for a good ten minutes until a knock on the door interrupted their reveries. Hermione jumped and Sirius yelped. Fred shot up looking like he was ready to sprint away at the first sign of trouble. Albus (unruffled-of course) allowed them a moment to calm themselves and then invited the guest in. It was revealed to be Severus, who scowled when he saw the office's occupants.

"Did I not get the time right Albus? You said you wanted to meet with me at 11:30, did you not?"

“Oh, we were just leaving!” Hermione said hastily and Sirius nodded. Fred mumbled something about, “...inform George.” And hurried to squeeze past the Potions Master and proceed to stumble down the stairs.

Hermione and Sirius vacated themselves just as quickly from the premises, with a very puzzled Snape staring after them

## Halloween Surprises

Courtney thought over everything she had read in her letters from Harry. She now knew all the happenings of Harry's first four years of schooling.

And she couldn't understand it. She couldn't understand how they had believed him a traitor-when he had done so much for them, shown them time after time who he was and what he stood for.

Why!? She wanted to yell at Professor Granger, the headmaster, Professor Black, Mr. Weasley...everyone! She was finally understanding why Harry Potter had left. She was angry now and she also understood why Harry had been hesitant to share his story with her for fear of what it would mean. Why?!

That was the question she wanted answered. But even as she wanted to shout the question and demand answers she knew that Harry himself had asked the same question probably millions of times and he had never gotten an answer.

He still had not written to her detailing his fifth year and his subsequent arrest, trial and incarceration, though he had written a short note to her responding to her last letter.

Dear Courtney

Thank you for telling me about your accidental revelation about our correspondence. I admire your honesty. Do not worry, I am not angry with you about it. To answer your questions; no, I had no idea about the Order of Merlin, Merlin's Staff nomination or the Wizengamot membership. Frankly, I don't care either, but thank you for sharing your research with me.

If at all possible please do not reveal our friendship to anyone else, although I will understand if I make it a bit difficult with my long letters. Not to mention how hard it would be if someone found out you had my old invisibility cloak. I expect in the next few days it will be even harder to conceal this, but I trust you to talk to the right people. As long as they leave me alone, I will be fine.

I will write again soon,

Harry Potter

She had puzzled a little bit over the implication that something was going to happen to make secrecy even harder? What was he going to do? Show up? She snorted at the thought. She had never met him face to face, but she did know him well enough to know how impossible that was.

She tucked the letter back into the folder where she kept all her Harry Potter related things. She needed to get to potions.

The combined class of Gryffindor and Ravenclaw was filled with excited murmurs, everyone was having trouble concentrating, especially since it was the last period of the day and the next day was the Halloween celebration. Snape's rather dramatic overbearing entrance put a halt to the talking but not to the restlessness of the pupils.

Snape ignored their restlessness and immediately set them to making their simple thought-clarifying potion.

Courtney and Angela worked together to complete it as best they could, however, neither of them were hot shots at potions. To their dread it had turned gray and was rapidly getting darker while it was supposed to be light pink. Snape glided over and sneered at their potion, "Ten points from Gryffindor" was all he said before he hurried over to Charlie Longbottom and started berating him as the cauldron melted, "Foolish boy! You are as bad as your father was at potions! You are supposed to be a Ravenclaw, like your mother!"

From Harry's letters Courtney had gotten a good idea of what Neville Longbottom was like, she smiled to herself remembering some of the escapades she had read about. She especially liked how they had cursed Draco Malfoy after Harry's fourth year. There was a fifth year Slytherin named Tiberius Malfoy, whom she guessed was Draco's son; more than once she had seen him bullying first years-even from his own house-and was lucky she herself had managed to avoid his harassment. Shaking herself and turning her mind back to the potions

dungeon, she and Angela talked about their plans for the next day as they cleaned up and packed their supplies.

Snape was busy assigning Longbottom a detention for his melted cauldron as the rest of the class filed out.

Angela and Courtney (along with an assortment of other Weasleys) spent the rest of the afternoon flying on the quidditch pitch under Professor Finch-Fletchley's supervision. Courtney was not all that good and never went very high, but she had fun. She knew she was not Quidditch material, but she wouldn't mind getting a broom of her own just for some joy riding. Maybe she would ask for one for her birthday from her parents.

At the thought of her parents she sighed. She missed her father a lot. It was almost as if he had dropped out of her life completely. Sometimes, though she had not told anyone, she would cry after reading a letter from Harry. She wished her father would speak to her. Her mother had told her that her father was now just ignoring the fact that she was a witch, rather than vocalizing protest. That wasn't much of a comfort though to the eleven-year-old.

When Professor Finch-Fletchley blew her whistle calling her in Courtney's mood was considerably more sour than it had been before at her contemplations over her father.

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The next morning all her depressive thoughts seemed to fly out the window as the sun rose, heralding a perfectly clear sky. The weather was cold, but the autumn colors made up for it. Excited students milled around the entrance hall waiting for the word allowing them to go.

Eventually Professor Black addressed them all saying, "Please check out with your head of house. All students below third year, you are expected back here by six o'clock, all other students be back by eight o'clock. When you return check in with your head of house. There will be teachers in the village as well to keep an eye on things. The

Halloween banquet will take place at 8:30 with some live entertainment. Have fun."

With that all the students crowded around their respective heads of house clamoring to be checked off the list and get to Hogsmeade. When Angela and Courtney finally made it through the queue to Professor McGonagall and out the main entrance they took off at a sprint and raced to Hogsmeade.

Angela, being the more athletic one, won the race and insisted that Courtney buy her a butterbeer. So they entered the Three Broomsticks, Courtney bought two butterbeers and they sat down at a table. The drink was a new experience for Courtney and she rather liked it, especially with how cold it was outside. They were soon joined by Caleb Weasley, Jonathan and Jared Weasley-identical twins in their third year, and Patricia Finch-Fletchley, a second year. Courtney felt a little out of place with all the Weasleys, but she had fun anyway. Half-way through listening to Jared's tail of a joke they had played their first year, Caleb interrupted, exclaiming, "Dad!"

All of them looked around to see a red-headed man grinning down at them.

"Uncle Fred!" chorused Jared, Jonathan, Patricia and Angela.

"Hello all, hello, hello."

"Dad, this is Courtney Barnes, the friend I wrote you about."

"I see. Good to meet you Miss Barnes. I met your mother two days ago. My wife took her to Diagon Alley and she spent the day there with her and my daughter Amanda."

Courtney raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"Why are you here?" Caleb asked curiously, "I thought you were in Diagon Alley today and Amanda was supposed to be here today. She promised me she would bring the MP3s she had converted." Since Muggle technology did not work in or around Hogwarts Fred and George had devised a spell years before to copy muggle music

into a magical Audiosphere that could be activated by a wand tap. Caleb loved his mother's muggle music, and was dying to have some of his pureblood friends listen to it.

"I know, when she found out about the shift change she gave them to me. I've got them back at the shop. Stop over and I'll give them to you. Meanwhile, I'd like to speak to Courtney."

Courtney was startled, and it seemed the other occupants of the table were too. Slightly confused, Courtney slid her chair out and followed Fred Weasley out of the Three Broomsticks.

They entered a store bearing the name Weasley Wizard Wheezes and proceeded to an office off the back room where Fred closed the door and indicated for her to sit down. Wondering what in the world was going on she politely accepted an offered glass of water. A second later the door re-opened and a man identical to Fred Weasley walked in.

"Courtney, this is my brother George. He is also the father of Jonathan and Jared. I'd like to get right down to business so we don't take up too much of your time," Fred explained as George sat down.

"Okay," Courtney said in a confused tone.

Fred sat back, "Two days ago I received a very...startling letter. It asked us to tell you this today, in private."

"Tell me what?" Courtney asked even more bewildered. George reached over and picked up a piece of parchment from the desk and handed it to her.

Effective October 29, 2021, Courtney Barnes holds one-third ownership of Weasley Wizard Wheezes Inc. She is entitled to one-third of its earnings and an unlimited supply of all products, as well as all other owner privileges. She has a say in all decisions affecting the future of the company.

Signed,

Fred Weasley  
George Weasley

Staring at the document in shock, Courtney said, rather inarticulately, "What does...? Why did you...? How...?"

In response Fred handed her another sheet of paper, written in a familiar hand.

"Harry Potter has given me everything he owns in the company?" she exclaimed.

Fred and George nodded solemnly. Courtney stared in silence at the parchment that had just made her a very wealthy eleven-year-old. She had a very good idea of how successful WWW was from Caleb and Jared (Jonathan was a Ravenclaw and so she did not know him as well).

George cleared his throat to catch her attention. When she looked up, he was holding a piece of paper. "All you need to do is sign this to make your partnership official in the eyes of the law." She took the document and quickly looked it over. There were certain legal restrictions on it because she was still a minor, but other than that everything looked right to her. She looked apprehensively at the twins, "Are you sure about this?" she squeaked out.

They both nodded and Fred presented her with a quill. She signed the document.

"About the restrictions because of your age, the lawyer had to put them in there because you are a minor agreeing to this without parental consent. The clause says that this contract can be annulled by your parents if they so choose until you reach the age of 17. However, even if your parents do decide to do that, we will still consult you before we make any major decision. If you want to remain a silent partner until you graduate, you may, or you can immediately get involved in the business affairs." George explained.

Courtney, with a dazed expression said, "I think I will stay a silent partner for the moment."

Fred and George nodded, expecting this response. They had her sign a statement to that effect, which she could revoke at any time. Then they handed her an envelope.

“That,” Fred said, “contains your bank key and account information for the Gringotts account containing one-third earnings from the business. That account, unlike our own, was put into savings so it has also been sitting untouched for sixteen years collecting interest.”

Courtney took the envelope, feeling the key slide around in it.

“Do you have any questions?” George asked.

Courtney, finally realizing this is what Harry had meant in his last letter about how it would soon become much harder to conceal their correspondence, asked, “Who else knows?”

“The lawyer we had handle it of course, but he is bound by lawyer-client confidentiality, Hermione, Sirius and Albus.” Fred said blushing, “I apologize, I was so stunned when I received the letter, I didn’t know what to do and so I consulted Albus. Hermione and Sirius happened to be in his office at the time. The three of them have promised not to tell anyone else. Sirius told us that Harry had been in contact with you, when it became apparent that an explanation was needed. He hopes you aren’t too upset with him. The only thing is, as our company is within the public domain it must become a matter of public record. I doubt anyone is going to look at the company information anytime soon, since most already know everything they want to. However, whenever we contract for a new site they receive all company information. We also have to inform our overseas investors of a change in ownership. It is likely that it will get leaked to the press in one way or another. As you are a silent partner right now, your signature is not required on any of our contracts, but you won’t be safe in that for long. I suggest you talk to Professor Dumbledore about having your mail screened. We will try to keep the attention away from you, but we won’t be perfect.”

Courtney nodded. Fred gave her a soft smile and stuck out his hand, “Good to have you in the company. I admit it is a little strange to

have an eleven-year-old owning part of the company, but I think it will work out."

Courtney shook his hand as well as George's and then stood and followed them out the door.

"Would you like one of us to talk to your parents about this? Or would you like to write them?" George asked as they walked through the back room towards the main store.

Courtney froze mid-stride. How would her parents react? She couldn't imagine her mother reacting very well to the idea. She didn't imagine any parent reacting well to the knowledge that their child had just been given one-third of a business from a complete stranger. She shuddered to think how her father would react. Would he forbid it?

"I...I'll write to them and tell them. Mr. Weasley," she addressed Fred, "You say you met my mother? Can I tell her to contact you with any questions?" Fred nodded and George said, "Please, call us Fred and George."

Courtney nodded as they resumed walking. They were almost to the door when it opened revealing Angela, Jonathan, Jared, Caleb and Patricia, as well as Monica, Monica's older sister Jennifer, and Justina (Patricia's older sister), which comprised all of the Weasley family currently attending Hogwarts. All eight of them bursting with questions.

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Courtney managed to avoid the Weasley's questions though she wasn't quite sure how. She vaguely remembered Fred, seeing her discomfort, making up some excuse as to why they had needed to talk to her. When Angelina, Caleb and Patricia (the rest were third year and above and could stay until 8 o'clock) got back to the castle, they started bombarding her with questions again.

"I know Uncle Fred was not telling us everything. Why did he really want to talk to you?" Angela said.

Courtney sighed, "It was a business transaction."

"Right, my uncles do business with eleven-year-olds," Angela said drily. Courtney pondered in silence. The information would eventually come out anyway and she knew her friends would be angry if they found out from reading the Daily Prophet rather than from her. So she told them, "Harry Potter gave me his one-third ownership of Weasley Wizard Wheezes."

All three of them started laughing.

~~\*\*~~

It had taken the interference of Professor Granger to end the shouting match that had broken out in the room where they had been talking. Angela and Caleb had been very angry at Courtney because they thought she had not been telling the truth. Patricia, more level-headed than her cousins, had been trying to get them to calm down so she could ask for proof. When Professor Granger found them (and assigned all except Patricia detentions) she was as angry as Angela had ever seen her.

"What is the meaning of this?" she hissed.

Angela, Caleb and Courtney looked sheepish. Hermione looked to her daughter, "Angela?"

Shifting her feet nervously, "She wouldn't tell us what was going on," she mumbled.

Hermione raised her eyebrow at Courtney, "I did tell her, she said I was lying."

"Why would The-Bloody-Man-Who-Disappeared Harry Potter give you his one-third ownership of WWW?" Angela said in frustration.

"Angela! Watch your mouth!" Hermione said, wondering at the acerbic tone in her daughter's voice. It almost sounded as though she hated Harry Potter.

“Sorry Mum,” Angela said, blushing.

“Fighting is not tolerated at Hogwarts. Patricia, ten points to Gryffindor for keeping a level-head. Angela, why would you get in an argument over something as trivial as this?”

“We’re supposed to be friends and she’s lying!” Angela insisted loudly.

“I am not lying,” Courtney said through clenched teeth as Caleb snorted.

“You will not start this again,” Hermione commanded, “Angela, Caleb, and Patricia, Courtney decided to trust you with a secret and you accused her of lying. She is not lying to you, Fred came to Hogwarts two days ago with a letter from Harry Potter instructing that his share of the company be given to Courtney. I don’t know why, nor does Courtney, but it is true.”

The three cousins were staring, mouths wide open, at Professor Granger.

Choosing not to notice the stares, she continued, “Caleb you will serve your detention with Professor Black, Angela with Filch and Courtney, with Professor Snape. Tomorrow night, 8 sharp.” Then she left the room.

Angela and Caleb, after offering awkward apologies, excused themselves. Patricia stayed a moment longer just looking at Courtney then she too left.

Courtney sighed, that was not the reaction she had been expecting or wanting and she was glad it was over with, if still a little bit peeved at Angela and Caleb. She was stuck in detention with Snape.

~~\*\*~~

After the feast, Angela, still embarrassed about the fight, excused herself and went to bed early. Courtney and Caleb reached a silent truce as they played Chess in front of the fireplace.

At quarter 'til eleven an owl tapped on the glass of the common room window and a sixth year opened it. The owl flew in and dropped the letter on Courtney's lap before leaving again.

Confused, because the letter looked to be neither from her mother nor from Harry, she opened the envelope and pulled out a computer print out.

Dear Courtney,

I know I have been awful to you these past few months. I am sorry. There is no justification for my actions, though I have reasons. I will not go into those reasons here, but I ask you to please be patient with an old man who is trying to change his ways. I am trying to accept this new aspect of your life and I hate that I have let myself become separated from you.

Please forgive me Courtney, please be patient with me. It may take some more time before I am comfortable with your new powers and what that brings into your life and consequently into mine.

I want you to know that I love you Courtney. No matter what, I will always love you. It may not seem so when I have been so awful, but I do.

Please be patient with me,

Love forever,  
Daddy

A/N

Well, I was going to do review responses, but it seems FFN is once again acting up. GRRR! Oh well, hope you liked this chapter. Next chapter? "Detentions and Discoveries."

Stay tuned!

## Detentions, Discoveries and Discussions

All day the next day Courtney kept the letter from her father in her pocket. Every chance she got she would take it out and re-read it. She was still stunned at receiving it. But she was happier than she had been in a long time. Even knowing that she had a detention with Snape that night could not dull her spirits. She skipped all the way from Herbology up to the castle and then hummed her way up the stairs to history class.

That day Professor Granger had them write another update about what they had learned about their person. This time she had no reservations about telling what she knew so far. Fred had told her that she knew about them writing to each other so she saw no harm in telling her what Harry had written.

Angela and Caleb were puzzled as to why Courtney was so happy. They had never seen her this animated. And she seemed to have completely forgotten the previous night's argument.

During lunch Courtney decided something-if her father had decided to write to her, then she would take a leap of faith in her father and ask Fred to go directly to her house and explain about WWW.

She wrote a letter and sent it to Fred and George asking them to go to her house as soon as possible and tell her parents.

After classes ended she had some time before she had to report to Snape. She decided to write her father back.

Dear Daddy,

She stopped, she didn't know how to write this letter. Though happy about hearing from her father, she was also very confused. After another twenty minutes, she gave up and decided to reply to him later. Instead she found herself writing to Harry again.

Dear Harry, (Harry had told her in his last letter to address him by his first name)

I thank you so much for the letters you have written to me. And...I don't even know what to say about the Weasley Wizard Wheezes thing...how do you thank someone for just handing you a fortune? I don't understand a single bit why you gave it to me. Can I just give it back to you please? How can I accept it? Thank you. Merlin, that is so...inadequate.

I now understand what you mean about it being harder and harder to conceal our friendship. Fred, George, the Headmaster, and Professor Granger all know now. The terms of the contract for me receiving your share of WWW state that (because I chose to be a silent partner for now) all "WWW affiliates must be notified of any change in business collaboration within a six month timeframe." Fred and George won't be notifying their other branches until they absolutely have to, but as it is a matter of public record anyone who just happens to feel like looking at the records for WWW will know.

I'm going to talk to the headmaster and ask his advice about how to keep the media away from me. How did you manage being famous and going to school at the same time?

Another thing...I'd like to ask your advice.

My father wrote to me. I received the letter yesterday. I've told you his reaction to the wizarding world. He hasn't contacted me at all since I left the day before school started. And now he writes me. I don't know what to think. In the letter, he asked me to forgive him and be patient while he tries to adjust.

I tried to write a reply, but I didn't know what to say. I'm confused. I know my father loves me, I always have known that, but it has hurt so much these last few months. I would cry many nights after receiving a letter from you, wishing my own father would be as open with me as you have been. What hurts most is that he still hasn't told me why he has been acting the way he has been. My father is a very good man. He usually doesn't do rash things; he is usually very methodical and logical about everything. He always thinks things through and has taught me the same. So why did he act like that? WHY? I am so confused.

I don't know if you can help me, or give me any advice, but I needed to tell someone what I was feeling.

Thank you,

Courtney Barnes

She folded the letter and ran up to the owlery to send it off with Rex. Then she hurried down to the dungeons for her detention.

George happened to be working in Hogsmeade and so he received Courtney's letter just minutes after she sent it. He called over to the Ministry and told Fred that Courtney wanted them to explain things to her parents. Fred then contacted his wife, who immediately called Kathryn.

"Kathryn, this is Megan Weasley." She said as soon as she answered the phone.

"Oh, hello, anything I can do for you?"

"Well, I know this is short notice, but would your family like to come to our house for dinner? You see, Fred just contacted me and said he wants to talk to you and your husband about something rather important."

"Well, we were just planning on going out to eat tonight. I wouldn't mind eating at your house," Kathryn sighed, "but I don't know if it would be a wise thing to ask David. I told you how he has been about the whole issue. He is getting better, but I don't want to push him." She bit her lip. David had confessed that he had actually written a letter to Courtney a few days before. Kathryn had been careful not to make a big deal about it, though secretly she was thrilled. But she knew it did not mean he was eager to spend the evening in a wizard's home.

Megan made a sympathetic noise and then answered, "I remember what you told me. I can try to make our home as non-magic as possible. We'll try and make him as comfortable as possible. I told

Fred about your husband's attitude so he knows not to play any jokes while you are here. Do you think it is possible?"

Kathryn thought for a moment and then, taking a deep breath, answered, "I'll try. I hate to do this, but all I can say is, if we show up, we show up, if we don't, we don't."

"That's perfectly alright, Kathryn. By the way, what is David's favorite meal. I don't think it will hurt to tempt him a bit with that."

Kathryn snorted in a very unladylike fashion and then answered, "David has a fetish for chicken for some reason. Fried is his favorite. And dessert, just provide a Mars Bar and he'll be as happy as a clam."

Megan laughed, "Can do. Would 7:00 be a good time? Fred will get home around 6:15."

"That should be fine, where do you live?"

Megan gave her an address on the northern outskirts of London and the two friends said good-bye.

As Kathryn hung up, she wondered how in the world she was going to convince her husband to go through with this.

Surprisingly, David only narrowed his eyes and grunted softly when Kathryn told him the change in dinner plans. Taking the lack of refusal as a 'yes' she breathed a sigh of relief. Giving them plenty of time to find the home, Kathryn herded her husband and son out to the car and started driving.

David was silent the entire ride, staring broodingly out the window as his son chattered happily about the picture he had drawn that day at school for Courtney. They arrived on time at a medium sized brick house with a wrap around porch and beautiful lawn.

Kathryn, holding a very excited Michael's hand and followed by her still-silent husband, knocked on the door.

It opened to reveal Amanda, the daughter who had spent the day with Megan and Kathryn.

“Kathryn, come on in! Mum mentioned you might be at dinner and so I decided to come home tonight. Brian also decided to pop in. George, that’s Dad’s twin brother, and his wife Alicia are here also. So we’ll have a pretty full dinner table, hope you don’t mind.” She said all of this very fast as she ushered them in and took their coats.

Amanda brought them into a dinning room with a very large food leaden table.

Megan broke into a very large smile as the three entered.

“Kathryn, glad you could make it! Michael, David, very good to meet you.” Michael smiled and shyly stepped behind his father’s leg. David nodded curtly.

Throughout the entire meal, Kathryn was alert for any change in David’s demeanor. He stayed silent through the entire thing. Everyone, it seemed, had been warned before hand not to bother David Barnes and so no awkward silences occurred, as might have happened if someone had addressed David.

After dessert (crunched up Mars Bars over ice cream) Fred asked Amanda and Brian to watch Michael while the others went into a sitting room.

Fred decided to get right down to business, “No doubt you are wondering what I asked you here for tonight.”

Kathryn nodded while David didn’t even seem to hear. She cringed at his rudeness. Fred ignored it.

“A few days ago I received a letter from a man I have not heard from in many years. He owns one third of the company George and I run. We made him a partner because it was his initial investment that made our entire company possible. Anyway, he told us he wanted his ownership and all the earnings from the store to be transferred immediately to your daughter.”

Kathryn's eyes widened.

"What?" she said.

George nodded, "We don't know why and we have no way of contacting him to ask why. He simply, inexplicably wanted your daughter to be given his share of the business. This means that Courtney has a fortune all her own and a say in all company matters. The only clause is that your consent is needed because she is a minor. We were instructed to tell Courtney on Halloween. She asked us to explain it to you two."

Kathryn sat shocked. She didn't even know how to start. Finally she burst out, "Who just gives an eleven-year-old a third of a company! Who is this guy? What is he playing at?"

Fred sighed, "His name is Harry Potter. He disappeared from the wizarding world sixteen years ago. No one has gotten any real communication back from him except your daughter. For some reason he was willing to talk to her, but we don't dare question it."

"Why not! I would certainly ask some questions!"

"Kathryn, calm down, please." George begged, "Harry was like another brother to us until he was sent to prison..."

"Prison?" screeched Kathryn.

"...on false charges." George finished his sentence, " He was framed for murder and sent to jail. This was all during the war. When it was found out he was innocent and he was released and compensated he left the wizarding world and asked never to be contacted again. Courtney is doing a project for history class on him and wrote to him. For some reason he answered. Why he has decided to reach out to your daughter, I don't know, but I will never stand in the way of something that makes Harry happy because we have already done enough to mess up his life."

Kathryn sat in stunned silence. Then she looked to David for support, advice, anything.

He was looking down at his hands.

“Kathryn,” Alicia said, “I wouldn’t worry about whether or not Harry is a safe person for Courtney to be friends with. I may not have seen Harry for twenty-six years, but I do know that he is not the type of person to hurt an eleven-year-old child, for any reason. If he wants to give gifts to your daughter, let him, because it simply means he wants her to have them.”

Kathryn closed her eyes, wishing with all her heart that David would do something, say something, even if he started yelling and refusing to allow Courtney the company ownership it would be better than leaving this entire burden on her.

“Please, David and Kathryn,” Megan said, seemingly reading her mind, “think this over, discuss it, write to Courtney and ask her. This isn’t something that needs to be decided right now and it needs to be thought through. We just wanted you to know.”

Kathryn nodded and looked at her friend and then stood, “Thank you for dinner, it was lovely,” David stood beside her, his face was blank.

They gathered Michael, said another thank you and good bye and left.

Fred closed the door behind the Barnes family, “Well, that went well,” he said sarcastically, “Megan, if I ever act like that David Barnes did, you are welcome to lock me in a room full of bludgers for a while.”

Megan rolled her eyes.

“Did he even say a word, all evening?” Fred asked.

“Yes,” Alicia answered, “He said ‘sorry’ to his son when he accidentally dropped some crumbs on him at dinner.”

George chuckled at his twin’s expression.

“So what do you think will happen?” Amanda asked having been filled in.

“No telling. I think it was actually a good sign that he didn’t say anything. From what Kathryn told me he was quite rude to Sirius when he first came to their house to tell them about the wizarding world. That he even agreed to come to dinner tonight was a miracle, I thought.” Megan commented.

George nodded, but he couldn’t get David’s expression out of his mind. He had been in the best position to see the man’s face; even though he had been looking down the whole time, George could still see his profile. He was sure he had seen a grin on the man’s face.

At eight o’clock Courtney showed up at Professor Snape’s office. She knocked and entered when she heard the man’s, “Come in.”

“Miss Barnes,” the potions master sneered, “I have Professor Granger to thank for assigning your detention to me-taking up my precious time. You will be working on preparing ingredients for a potion that the headmaster has asked me to make as a demonstration for my NEWT class. Start grinding these scarab beetles,” he thrust a bowl and pestle at her and turned to a glass case.

As she worked, Courtney tried to get a closer look at what he was doing. She realized a few minutes later that the glass case was filled with snakes.

She tried to move inconspicuously closer in order to watch him. He picked up one of the creatures-which looked dead-and opened it’s mouth and did something to the snake’s fangs. Then he stuck the fangs (head, body and all) into what looked like an inch thick foam layer over about twenty glass vials. She could see liquid dribbling into the containers.

Finally, she gave in to her curiosity and still concentrating on the snakes themselves. “What are you doing?”

Snape practically jumped out of his skin and whirled around, snake in one hand, wand in the other. His eyes narrowed dangerously and Courtney actually stepped back, frightened.

“What did you say?” he asked in a menacing tone.

“I just said ‘what are you doing’,” she stammered, gripping the pestle convulsively.

He eyed her for a moment and then seemed to shake himself and relax. He turned back and continued his work while actually answering her question, “I am extracting the venom.”

Watching the process intently while grinding the beetles ever finer, she was fascinated. After ten minutes she ventured another question, “Are they dead?”

Snape’s back visibly stiffened under his robes and he whirled around and snarled, “You are here to work, not stand idly blabbering. Do as you are told and shut up! If you are done with the beetles than start shredding the mandrake leaves on the table over there.”

Courtney didn’t let so much as a peep escape her lips the rest of the night. At ten, Snape ordered her to leave. She fled.

Severus sat down as soon as she closed the door behind her. His heart was still pounding in shock. At first he had just thought he had misheard-just not been paying attention to the girl, but the second time.... He shuddered. None of his memories of hearing parseltongue were pleasant. This child was a parselmouth, he was positive. The second time he had distinctly heard hissing and even the unconscious snakes had spasmed at the sound of their language spoken by a magical being. After a few minutes, he rushed out of his office and up to Albus’.

David knew he and Kathryn were going to have a talk after they got home. So he rode in silence preparing for the inevitable. Sure enough, as soon as Michael was in bed, Kathryn curtly nodded for him to follow. After closing the door of the den, she rounded on him.

“David, I can’t handle this. I cannot be both mother and father to Courtney. I cannot make these decisions alone; I can’t do it with out you! I don’t care that you are uncomfortable with the situation, you will shoulder your responsibilities in this family. This marriage is, and always has been, an equal partnership. I cannot be the only one to support Courtney. You have got to help!” she refrained from yelling, so as not to disturb Michael, but her tone of voice was no less menacing.

“And,” she continued, “you will start by discussing with me whether or not we will allow Courtney to keep this share of this company, or allow her to accept gifts from this Harry Potter at all.” She folded her arms and glared at him.

David sighed, “I am sorry Kathryn. I should have acted better tonight....”

“David this isn’t about tonight, as appalling as your behavior was. This is about our daughter! I have put up with this for long enough, and I know you have been better about it, but you have got to get over it now! I don’t know what to do for Courtney and I need your help! I don’t know what is best for her anymore. She is experiencing a life that I don’t know, can never know, anything about and I need your support because this is getting to be too much for me to handle alone!”

“Kathryn...”

“You know what David, I am really not in the mood for discussion anymore, I am tired and exhausted and I am going to go to bed. We will talk tomorrow.” With that, she left the room.

David thought a long time about what Kathryn had said. His wife was long asleep. He had some serious decisions to make.

“Severus! What brings you here so late? I was just about to turn in,” the headmaster greeted him.

“Headmaster, we have a problem.”

Albus raised an eyebrow, "What sort of problem?"

"I just finished a detention with Miss Barnes of Gryffindor. I discovered, quite by accident, that she is a parselmouth."

Albus sat up straighter, "Tell me what happened."

Severus described it and then added, "I believe she did not even realize she had switched languages, I doubt she knows she can speak parseltongue."

Albus stroked his beard slowly, not betraying the racing thoughts in his mind. There was silence for a few moments and then Severus spoke again.

"Headmaster, I know for a fact that Voldemort forced himself on many women during both his first and second reigns, and not all of them died. There is a possibility that he has descendants."

Albus nodded sharply and said, "I will take this into consideration. Please, do not tell anyone else of this discovery."

Snape nodded and quickly left the office.

Albus sat there for a long time. The pieces all fit together now. No, Courtney was not a descendant of the Dark Lord, she was a descendant of Harry Potter. It explained everything. Her wand, the letters, the gifts, David Barnes' dislike of the magical world...it all fit. There could be no other explanation. Of course Severus would not have come to that conclusion-he would automatically connect parseltongue with Voldemort.

Severus and Albus knew of the parseltongue ability. Hermione, Albus and Ollivander knew about the wand. A few people knew about the friendship between the two but nothing else. Albus was the only one who had all the pieces, and he intended on keeping it that way.

Albus recalled the first time he had met Courtney in Diagon Alley in early August. She had seemed familiar to him, but he had not been

able to place the resemblance. Now he realized she had reminded him of her grandmother, Lily Evans Potter.

Author notes and replies to reviews:

Ok, sorry this took longer than the past few chapters. I just was wrestling with the decision of whether or not Albus should figure it out or not. See, I envision the plot at a part some two months in the future where I like either scenario-meaning I like a scene I had written in the future where David tells Albus the truth and also one where Albus reveals how long he has known the truth. But, this way I think I like better. It brings in some complications on Albus' part. Kudos to anyone who can guess what those complications are!

Hmm, I just gave away that the truth would be revealed in two months...two months story time that is, not two months our time.

A reminder to EVERYBODY, I know FFN periodically disappears or goes haywire. For that reason, I created a Yahoo group where I always post first. Everyone is welcome to join. The 'Homepage' link on my Author page is the group. ( I would put it here, but FFN likes to delete all links in uploads.)

## My Decision

Sometimes I want to just yell at Kathryn that she doesn't understand the slightest thing about me, or why I act the way I do. I almost did last night when she was lecturing me about my responsibilities.

Why didn't I? Simple.

She's right.

It is unbelievably hard admitting that to myself. I try and deny it, but it is of no use. That is why I didn't counter anything Kathryn said.

Well, that and the fact that, if I told her that she didn't understand, she would just tell me that it was my own fault because I wouldn't tell her anyway.

Which was also true.

Either way you look at it, it was better to keep my mouth shut.

But now I have to decide what to do. I know it is time for something to change, but...how? What?

Kathryn wants me to fully support Courtney. I can't do that. I can't give her my complete blessing to join a world that might end up hurting her as badly as it did me. And if anything does happen to Courtney...if she gets hurt...they will be sorry.

My secretary interrupts my thoughts as she hands me the list of appointments for tomorrow. I thank her absently and leave work. I walk slowly to the park where I have become accustomed to waiting for owls from Courtney. Sure enough, five minutes after I arrive, I see Rex soaring towards me. He lands on my shoulder and presents the latest letter for Harry Potter to me. In turn, I provide him with some crumbs and he hoots appreciatively and flies away. I sit down at the picnic table to read the letter.

When I finish, I almost wish I had not read it. Irony is the constant companion in my life it seems. I never expected Courtney to write to

me, as Harry, and ask advice about me, as her father. I look back at her words and a deep sigh escapes me. I sure am one to talk about others hurting Courtney when I have hurt her so much myself.

She didn't know what to say to her father so she wrote to Harry Potter.

Great, now my decision is that much harder.

~~\*\*~~

It has been a day and I am still unsure of what to do. Thankfully, Kathryn senses that I am re-evaluating things and does not push me at the moment, though if I take too long I know she will.

I need to figure this out.

I know Kathryn is right and I need to fulfill my responsibility as a father. I know Courtney is hurting. I know I love both Kathryn and Courtney and I hate myself for hurting both of them. I know that Michael is confused-in his eyes his mother loves his sister and his father does not and he doesn't know what to feel.

I will not reveal my past. I cannot, I refuse to. It is not necessary. Bringing up that will not help. It is in the past, it is finished, I have left it behind long ago.

Somehow, I must resolve this conflict.

~~\*\*~~

I asked one of the neighbors to watch Michael for the night so Kathryn and I could talk. We sat down in the living room and she looked at me expectantly. I can't meet her eyes.

"I know you are right Kathryn. I know I have a responsibility, I know I have left you too much to handle by yourself. I can't give you my reasons, but...I will change Kathryn. I will do better, I will show Courtney my support."

There is a moment of silence and then Kathryn says, "Will you really be supporting her?"

I hesitate, contemplating a lie, but...no, I will not lie. I shake my head slowly and answer, "I am trying, I am doing what I can, but we both know that change is a slow process. However, I will not let Courtney suffer any longer simply because I am squeamish. For all intents and purposes I will fully support her. Perhaps in pretending it will become true faster."

I dare to look at Kathryn. Her lips are pursed and she does not look happy, but I can tell she also realizes that this is the best she'll get.

"Very well David, you can start now, by discussing Courtney's recent business acquisition."

I think for a moment then I answer, "I believe it is best if we let her keep it. Someone has been very generous to her, who am I to stop her from enjoying a friendship she has cultivated? If it causes problems in the future, we can simply revoke our approval until she reaches the age of majority."

A small smile graces Kathryn's face and I realize that I just passed her test-whether I would truly try or not.

Now I simply wonder how to convince Courtney that I am genuine, without having to answer her questions as to why I acted the way I did. I would be playing the epitome of the Muggle-born's father, but the hardest person to convince would be my own daughter.

A/N:

He he he! No he has not told Kathryn! \*grins evilly\* Next chapter should be up within a week. Sorry things are taking a little longer-my mind keeps writing future scenes without wanting to compose the connecting material.... (For example-last night while I was trying to write this all that would come to my head was a scene between Albus and David in which Albus confesses he knows David's true identity and the scene as is would make no sense to anyone besides me.)

Anyway, I am sorry this was so short, I just hope it clears up some things.

If you still are confused, Harry is not confessing to Courtney or Kathryn because he has tried his hardest to bury it. He does not realize it, but he is partially justifying not telling about his past by the fact that Harry Potter writes to Courtney and tells her everything. If he did not do that, it would be more apparent to him that he really should tell his family the truth.

## A Hero's Tale

It had been two weeks since Courtney had sent her letter to Harry asking his advice. She had been very busy with schoolwork as the term only had four weeks left. She was frantically compiling all the information she had about Harry into a paper, though she was still missing the information concerning his fifth year and his time spent in prison. A week ago she had received a note from both her parents saying they had agreed to allow her to keep her share of WWW. She was relieved at their response and ecstatic that her father had agreed. He had written her a note separately, in which he simply told her how things were going with him. She had responded in kind, telling him about her schoolwork. She had even gone so far as to explain Quidditch. She didn't know how he would receive that but she didn't really know what else to say.

She wondered what this sudden change in her father was anyway. The letter from him was written as though they had had an uninterrupted communication between them the entire time. She had been so confused that she had actually gone to Professor Black (who had been the only teacher to meet her father) and talk to him about it. He had simply encouraged her to follow her father's lead, as it seemed her father was trying very hard to become the kind of father Courtney needed.

So, though she was still confused, she decided to give her dad a chance to show he really meant this change and forgave him. That morning she had sent off a letter to him saying that she forgave him and she thanked him for trying.

As she quickly walked to Potions, she reflected on the strange behavior of the professor. Ever since the night of her detention, he always seemed to be watching her. To be honest it creeped her out. In class, he would rarely single her out vocally, but by now everyone had caught on that he watched her almost singularly. Consequently, the entire class kept sneaking glances at her. It didn't help that she wasn't good at potions anyway. In short, she was growing to hate potions class.

After suffering through that period she gladly left the dungeons and entered the lunch room before many of her peers. She ate quickly and managed to avoid the rush. She knew Angela wanted to talk to her, probably about Snape's class again. She, however, was not in the mood for Angela's pep talk. In the common room, she relaxed by the fireplace and opened her book to review her Charms homework.

A hoot interrupted her and she looked up to see Rex. Delighted, she jumped up and retrieved the package attached to his leg. She was surprised that it was a package. She was about to open it when she heard voices outside. Looking at her watch she realized that she had about ten minutes to get to Charms class.

Quickly running upstairs to her dormitory, she jumped on her bed and opened the package. At the very top were a number of folded parchment sheets. She took them out and set the box aside.

Opening them she started reading.

Dear Courtney,

I am honored you have decided to confide in me your confusion about your father. The way you are feeling is perfectly understandable. However, I fear that I am not the best person to ask about forgiving others. I hope everything works out though. Just remember that your father loves you.

I also apologize that this letter has taken me so long to get to you. This has been the hardest letter I have ever had to write. Please, once I have told you all that happened, do not bring it up again. I do not wish to recall it more than I have to.

The summer following my fourth year was probably the worst one. My relatives, still blaming me for the prank Fred and George played on Dudley, were determined to make my summer horrible. I was fed one meal a day and the rest of the day I was expected to perform all manner of chores and services for the Dursleys. Sometimes they would just have me do something just to take up my time. I think I had to reorganize all the books in Uncle Vernon's library at least four times: alphabetical order by author, alphabetical order by title,

chronological order by publication date, and in order by call number according to the Dewey Decimal system. A lot of what they had me do was just plain tedious. I actually didn't mind the tedious, it was claming to my nerves. The worst was the out door work that they forced me to do as it was very exhausting, especially since I was half-starved. As I said, it was not a pleasant summer.

What made it worse was the fact that Voldemort was active again. He did not attain the notice of the Ministry, as he kept his attacks mostly out of the public view. He attacked those involved with Dumbledore and so the Ministry discounted it all as Dumbledore being an Alarmist. However, thanks to my scar, I witnessed a lot of what he did that summer. It was horrible Courtney and I will not describe what I saw. It didn't help that the connection between Voldemort and myself seemed to be getting progressively stronger as he increased his power. I guess it makes since because he put a portion of his own power into me when I was one and that he used my blood to resurrect himself. The only good thing that I could see was that he was unaware of the connection and he could not observe me as I did him. I suspect that the reason the connection only allowed me to sense him and not vice versa was because in both circumstances that we were bonded, I was the unwilling participant and that partially blocked him. As he was the one to purposely attack me at age one (and thus, in a way purposely transmitted his power) and the one to forcibly take my blood, he willingly (if not knowingly) entered into the bond so he was not blocked.

Physically and emotionally, I was worn down by the end of the summer. My dreams were not constant at that point so I didn't know everything that was going on. I knew he was planning something big but I didn't know details.

In October of my fifth year, Voldemort attacked the Ministry offices underground in London. The Ministry could no longer deny his return and so they went to the other extreme. Anyone even suspected of being involved in Dark activities in any way was arrested and interrogated. Yet in their incompetence they could not catch the real Death Eaters-though it was finally publicized that many people influential in the Ministry were Death Eaters, such as Malfoy and Macnair.

My school work was suffering greatly because of my inability to get a restful sleep (I discovered that Dreamless Sleep did nothing to block visions and only ended up prolonging my stay in whatever setting Voldemort was in) and my subsequent inability to concentrate. If Quidditch had been allowed that year, I most likely would have been taken off the team because of my grades.

Somehow, I managed to get through the term in one piece. My visions of Voldemort were becoming disturbingly frequent. However, I had trouble remembering everything. Details, words, names, important facts were lost on me. Perhaps if I had been able to remember better I would have known what Voldemort was planning. Unfortunately, I had an almost perfect memory of the sights.

Ron and Hermione were there for me that term, like they had never been before. They seemed to be able to read my mind half the time and know exactly when I needed to talk and when I should be left alone. I also started dating Ginny that term. Sirius and I kept up a frequent communication and Professor Dumbledore opened his office to me many times when I needed a wiser ear. In short, even though it was the threat was greater to me at that time than probably at any time in my first four years, I was happier because I had a support network.

Support was something I never had growing up. As I have told you before, my guardians hated and feared me. So, they belittled and disparaged me at every chance. Growing up in that environment is not conducive to trusting anyone easily or reaching out to ask for help. So after four years I was finally coming to ask for help from the adults in my life and trust my friends with my insecurities. I even confided in Sirius exactly how badly I was treated at the Dursleys. He encouraged me to go to Dumbledore and report to him the neglect and borderline abuse that I had experienced all my life. I finally did at the beginning of December. After I had told him everything, he promised me that I would not have to return to their home for the summer. I remember thinking after leaving that, had I known that would be the result, I would have gone to him years earlier.

As tensions rose outside the castle though in early December I experienced some of the worst visions I had ever had. They were so awful that I could not bring myself to talk about them at the time. Trusting others outside myself, was still a new thing and I guess I was a little bit scared at how they would react to my visions. They were so horrible and each dream reinforced my belief that I was at fault for Voldemort's rebirth (I am sure they all knew I blamed myself, though I would never talk about it). I was afraid that they would realize the same thing as they understood how bad it was getting and so I pulled away. I guess they were worried I would sink into depression because as I stopped being so open about my visions they made sure I was never alone. I didn't mind actually, because if someone was there with me I could keep myself from thinking about my visions.

I dreaded sleep at that point. I would often go three nights in a row without sleeping, until Hermione, Ron or Ginny, or all three, would drag me to Madam Pomfrey where she would force me to go to sleep using a combination of potions, spells and magical artifacts.

Despite all that, Christmas was wonderful. Most of the students stayed at school because their parents knew it was most likely safer than their homes. Some families went so far as to travel to the school in order to spend Christmas together. Such was the case with the Weasleys. All the older children along with Mr. and Mrs. Weasley came to Hogwarts. Professor Dumbledore even arranged for Hermione's parents to be there on Christmas day. And Sirius (remember he was still a convict then) was there that night to exchange gifts with me in private.

On New Year's Day, I had the worst vision ever. My scar actually opened up and bled and I literally went into shock because what I had seen was so horrible. Of course, when the reports came in of the end result of the attack Dumbledore knew I had witnessed it, but even the end result did not communicate the process. I spent the next few days in the hospital wing unable to eat and unwilling to even speak.

On the third day, I made a decision. I knew I would continue having visions and there would be more like what I had seen. So, I made the decision that I would not give up. I had so much to live for, I had friends, I had family, if not in blood, in spirit, I had people who loved

me and who would stand by me. I determined that I would fight my hardest against Voldemort and in the meantime take advantage of the time I had with my friends. I would not let Voldemort determine my reactions.

A week after I was walking from the library back to Gryffindor Tower when I met Ron in the hallway. He seemed excited and so I followed him as he babbled about the card he had just gotten with his Chocolate Frog. I stopped and laughed because I remembered the first time I ever ate a Chocolate Frog on the train ride to Hogwarts. Humoring his excitement, I reached out to look at the card.

As soon as I touched it I realized it was a portkey. I was transported, with Ron, to the Forbidden Forest. Shocked and angry, I demanded to know what was going on. He responded by putting the full body-bind on me and confiscating my wand. I realized as he was standing there that 'Ron' was not holding his own wand. I concluded that this was somebody under Polyjuice potion. Whomever it was seemed nervous and kept looking around as though waiting for someone to come. Finally there was a POP and Wormtail was there.

They discussed something too far for me to be able to hear and then Wormtail came over to me and took some of my hair. I saw him drink the Polyjuice potion and turn into me and hurry up to the castle.

Half an hour later, the Polyjuice potion wore off 'Ron' and I saw that it was Draco Malfoy. He sneered and said "This will be the end of you." Then he released the full body-bind and grabbed another portkey before I could react. I was left to my own devices to return to the castle. I was confused and worried about what the big picture here was. I had been kidnapped but unharmed. Yes, the forbidden forest was dangerous, but not enough to warrant the 'end of me.' I wondered what had happened to the real Ron and so I hurried back to Hogwarts.

I could see the lights and turrets between the trees when I heard "Stupefy!" from my left and fell to the ground stunned.

When I was revived I was sitting in a chair-chained to it-looking at a fully convened Wizengamot. I could see Dumbledore with them and

among the spectators I saw my teachers, friends, the Weasleys and many others. I even saw Remus with Snuffles.

I was disoriented and I could hardly concentrate on what was being said. I felt cold and knew there must be a Dementor or two around. I forced myself to focus and when I did I heard Ron testifying that I had killed Hagrid. I heard Arabella Figg and Remus Lupin both testify as well.

Then Dumbledore, Hermione and half my teachers testified about my recently 'changed behavior' as evidence of my switch over to the 'Dark side.' My sudden change from depression to normalcy was seen as 'suspicious.'

I was not given a chance to speak in my own defense, I was given no option for an appeal, no chance to testify under Veritaserum. Minister Fudge turned to the convened Wizengamot and said, "Harry James Potter stands accused of two counts of using unforgivable curses, one count of murder, one count of evading arrest, and one count of consorting with known criminals. You have heard the testimony of the witnesses."

Then he called for a verdict. It was unanimous, I was proclaimed guilty. Then Fudge gave the sentence. "As a minor, Harry James Potter can not be sentenced to the Dementor's Kiss, therefore he is hereby sentenced to Life in Azkaban."

I was hysterical, crying, pleading, insisting I was innocent. They ignored me. I started shouting and Fudge used a silencing spell. I looked frantically around trying to find support. I looked at Hermione and Ron, but had hatred in their eyes. Dumbledore's face was a mass of rage and I knew it was directed at me. My teachers had mixed looks of disgust and anger. Then I saw Sirius. Although he was a dog, I could perfectly read his expression. I saw no anger; instead, Sirius looked dead. He looked so disappointed and hurt that I started crying again. He actually thought I had done it! Two Aurors unchained me from the chair and escorted me to a cell where I would wait for transport to Azkaban.

I had no energy, no will. I could not move sitting there in the holding cell. My world had literally come crashing down. Everyone I knew and everyone I trusted had turned their back on me. They had betrayed me. I had promised myself that as long as I had people who cared for me, people who I trusted I would not give up. And now it was all gone.

Dumbledore (his face no longer filled with anger) came to the cell and said, in a voice that sounded old, weary and pained, "You made some very serious, very wrong choices, and now you must live with the consequences. I don't think I will ever understand why you made this choice, but I cannot bring myself to believe you have an evil heart. I think you have made a terrible, terrible mistake, but I hope for your sake that you can find forgiveness in yourself for your choices." The self-righteous bastard. I would have laughed at him in the face had the silencing charm been removed. Then, just to add the icing on the cake, he said, "You have ruined your life Harry, but you have done more than that. You have ripped out the hope of hundreds of people and you have ruined Snuffles' life as well. You were his reason for living and you have utterly destroyed him." Then he left.

A few minutes later two Dementors and an Auror came and escorted me via portkey to the shore and from there on a boat to Azkaban itself. I had long since lost consciousness because of the Dementors. I woke up in the Azkaban interrogation room. There two Aurors tried to get me to tell of Voldemort's plans, or what my other plans had been, or who my accomplices were, anything. I had next to nothing to tell and what I did tell (what I knew from my visions) they took as even more evidence that I had in fact, been working for Voldemort. They didn't bother with using truth serums-I was simply a prisoner- so they used the old fashioned way when they thought I was lying or being recalcitrant, that is to say they used torture.

In the muggle world, it is called 'police brutality' and it is a criminal charge, in the wizarding world no such law exists. Or, if it does, those doing it never get caught because prisoners have no rights, no way to seek redress. It was horrible, it was humiliating, it was worse than anything Voldemort had veer done to me (though not worse than what I had seen him do). After I passed out, I was moved to a cell that would be my home for the next ten years.

After a day I was almost insane. I kept hearing my parents die, seeing Cedric die, seeing Voldemort's rebirth, feeling the heartache of the betrayal over and over again. Then I started reliving in vivid detail every vision I had had. I saw those people tortured, raped, and murdered over and over again. On the second day, I tried to kill myself. I was completely broken and simply wanted peace now. Of course, the Aurors couldn't have me getting out the easy way and so they saved my life. I was put in the infirmary wing of the prison while I was being healed (and they let things heal naturally there to simply prolong the pain). The infirmary is worse than the actual cells. For a week I lay on a cold metal slab, unable to move because of the straps and chains that bound me there and unable to think because two dementors roamed around there freely. I was force-fed soup and water everyday.

Then I was thrown back into my cell and there was a dementor stationed at the door twenty-four hours a day for a week. After that week was over I was about ready to die simply of natural causes. I held on to my last bit of sanity with all that I had. My sanity was my betrayal. If I could recall that I was innocent then I would stay sane. Sometimes I would forget. Sometimes, for weeks, I would simply give in to the black hole inside of me, the hole that sucked me down that beckoned to me with sweet release. For periods of time, I was, literally, insane. I was not the type to babble insanely, I would simply do nothing. Then eventually, somehow, I would come back to myself and I would remember where I was, why I was there, everything. My world would crash down over and over again. Then Voldemort made his move. Every night I would see him, hear him, feel what he did. The connection became stronger than ever as he started exercising his powers more; it seemed to open the connection wider. Pretty soon my visions were invading my waking hours. All I could do sometimes was hold my scar and whimper as I felt myself slowly dying from all the pain and agony.

I was weak, I was half-starved and the torture continued. Somehow, my body survived, though not with my mind completely intact. I didn't know how long I had been there until it was time for the yearly physical-basically a doctor gave his professional opinion that we were still alive and if we were close to dying gave horrible concoctions that would give our bodies nourishment (and the sudden influx of needed

nutrients would almost kill us because our bodies could not handle it) in order to make us live longer.

Ten years passed in the worst agony ever imaginable. I take that back, you can't even imagine it. What made it even worse was that, just a few months after my incarceration, the connection between Voldemort reached its peak and never went back down. Whenever Voldemort called on his connection with even one Death Eater it created a sort of...echo along the connection with me. For ten years, I witnessed every plan from its first planning stages to its full fruition. I literally watched thousands of people die and I, who could have done something about it, could do nothing. I know I could not have saved them all, or even most of them, but my information could have saved lives. Yet, I could do nothing.

In truth that was the whole crux of the matter. Perhaps, (and this is a very big perhaps) I could have eventually forgiven them if it had simply been a matter of my own health and happiness. Black managed to do it. They broke the trust, the friendship, the love that had been between us, but even then I might have been able to help rebuild their society after taking some time to reevaluate my place in the world. I would never have been able to trust them as I had before, I would never have been able to be a part of it all like I had been before, those things were gone forever, but I might have been able to stand being in association with them. But it wasn't just about me. It was about a three year old I saw tortured to death by her own father who could not fight the Imperius Curse, it was about a woman who lost her dignity and self-respect at the hands of Death Eaters, it was about an entire town that was utterly destroyed while Voldemort simply looked on in sick pleasure.

I am not so foolish to play the game of 'what if.' I am not saying I could have even saved on life, but if I had been able to even attempt to help, to give a warning, to do anything, then maybe the screams would no longer haunt my dreams. Maybe I would no longer wake up in a cold sweat at nights, shaking at the memory of the pain. I was helpless and they were responsible for it. They prevented me from doing what I had dedicated all my ambitions toward and everything I stood for and, consequently, what they claimed they stood for. They

betrayed me and betrayed their own ideals in doing so. That is what I cannot forgive.

Merlin, Courtney, I am sorry, I don't mean to bog you down. I should not have gone into detail. I am not even sure that I am communicating what I felt correctly. Again, I apologize Courtney, it is wrong of me to lay this burden on you.

I will simply continue my story. For ten years, I was an onlooker to the worst atrocities ever committed, eventually I managed to keep sane by remembering I was innocent and that I would have my revenge on Voldemort. And so, as I watched, I learned. I learned magic, spells, theories, dueling techniques, shielding, you name it, I probably learned about it. I learned from both sides, watching the so-called-Light Side, analyzing their strengths and weaknesses, what worked what didn't and I did the same for Voldemort's army. In time I could tell who each Death Eater was simply by the way in which he moved his wand, or which tactics he leaned on most. I could do the same for the light. I could match up exactly which person should duel with which in order to ensure the desired outcome of the battle. But I couldn't.

I was startled awake one day by Ron Weasley, who informed me I was to be transferred elsewhere. I had expected something like that (though to be honest, I almost thought they would kill me to achieve the same ends) because I knew Voldemort was planning on attacking the prison and that they would realize the potential of him accessing my power through the shared connection. I was taken to Hogwarts and locked in the dungeons. Away from the Dementors my mind was clearer than it had been in a decade. In that cell, I almost wept with relief to be away from my mother's screams, away from Cedric haunting me. Unfortunately, the visions did not stop, nor did the detail diminish.

Oddly enough, Voldemort seemed to quiet down for a few weeks. From what I could gather, he was mustering his forces for a big attack. I found out what his plan was and I finally got to do something with what I knew. I told Dumbledore about it. At that point, I didn't care if he believed me or not, I had done my duty and, perhaps, I could be at peace with myself for one day.

Dumbledore did believe me. I wondered why at the time. Perhaps you should ask him if you want to know the answer. I don't remember how my information influenced the battle, but I knew I had succeeded in my responsibility and that was all that mattered. I didn't really supply any more information because Voldemort, who had been trying to weed out the spy in his forces had not been able to figure out who had tipped off the Order and the Ministry about the attack on Diagon Alley had simply given up on that objective and instead was preparing for the final decisive battle. Snape had informed Dumbledore of what he knew and that was as much as I knew. Voldemort was keeping his own counsel and not telling a single person his plans.

Voldemort attacked Hogwarts at full strength. He had his entire army there, he had his supporters from around the world, and Dumbledore had his supporters gathered from everywhere. You have to understand, Courtney, this was a war of tremendous scale, it was global, there was not a single country in which a magical being lived that was not directly affected by Voldemort. It was not limited to humans either, it was armies of goblins, centaurs, giants, trolls, the undead and every species that had the mental capacity to choose a side (and even some that didn't). This final battle was going to be the decisive one, everyone knew it.

I could see the scene with perfect clarity. Voldemort being so close and simply expending magic in any amount brought the connection 'on-line' so to speak. The battle reminded me of the scene from the movie 'The Fellowship of the Ring' made about twenty years ago. There is an epic battle scene at the beginning that is the closest thing I can compare this battle to.

I watched as Voldemort's army got closer and closer (mind you, this 'final battle' took place over the span of two months). He, himself, did not cross into Hogwarts, but his minions did. Then I saw him instruct Snape to bring me out of the castle, that he had an offer to make me. He did a complex monitoring spell on Snape to insure he accomplished that which he was told to do. When Snape came to me I did not even pay attention to what he said, I simply followed, while my attention was on the battle. I saw Dumbledore lose his wand and Voldemort erect the security dome. I had seen a security dome used

before, I knew how it worked, the principles behind it. I managed to slip Snape's wand from his pocket without his notice. I believe he was just too caught up in wondering what he should do.

We entered into the security dome and then Snape left as well as the two Death Eaters that were holding Dumbledore. Then Voldemort told Dumbledore that I was innocent, that Wormtail had framed me, that they had all betrayed me. Then Voldemort turned to me and asked if I would do the honors of killing Dumbledore. I stated that I needed a wand (I had put Snape's in my pocket) and that I wanted everyone to hear what was happening. Voldemort modified the security dome so people outside could hear and then handed me his own wand. I was probably the person most compatible with that wand besides Voldemort himself.

I shot the killing curse at the dome itself. If you do not know how a security dome works I will explain briefly. A Security dome is tied directly into the castor's power center. It becomes an extension of your own body. Unlike other shields, which will disappear or break under a powerful enough curse or hex, the security dome, acting like an extension of the body, conducts the spell directly back at the castor. However, that is only from the inside. The outside of the security dome might as well be a wall of pure magic. It is so incredibly strong because it is connected directly to the source of your power. Most wizards are incapable of putting that much power into it and are therefore unable to ever use the Security Dome. However, because it feeds off so much of your power continuously you cannot spare enough energy to perform very much complex magic. I doubt Voldemort could have actually cast the killing curse even if he had wanted to. So, within the security dome you should only ever invite someone you trust because they can take full advantage of you while your magic is otherwise occupied and they have a full 360° radius to aim at. Just for your information, Security Domes are most often used in battle where one healer casts it over a number of injured people while other healers tend to wounds.

Voldemort handed me his wand, and it really was the stupidest thing he ever did. The killing curse rebounded off the dome and hit Voldemort. I threw Dumbledore Snape's wand and we both used the killing curse again. Voldemort died. The Dome fell. You would be

amazed at how quickly everything ended after that. There were thousands of Voldemort's supporters there and within hours they were all rounded up.

I didn't really care about the clean-up job though. My part was done and all I wanted was to leave, to never come back, to have peace and stability in my life that I knew I would never find in the Wizarding World. That night I went to Sirius' apartment at his behest. It was an encounter I do not wish to discuss. Sirius, acting almost as though he was the injured party. The next day in a meeting with Minister of Magic Amos Diggory, Dumbledore and Sirius, I declared my intentions.

They tried apologizing but I really wasn't interested. Instead, I extracted from the Wizard's Oaths that they would all leave me alone (as well as their respective organizations). Then I left the wizarding world.

I have never had any regrets about that decision, I have never had any desire to return. I have lived happily these past sixteen years with my wife and children. I do regret, though, that I have not been able to bring myself to tell my family of my past. No, I don't, it is past, it is done with, they do not need to know.

This has been a very difficult thing for me to write Courtney, and I hope I have not traumatized you in any way. I almost regret doing this, but...you have a right to know the truth, as does everyone else.

Contained in the package along with this letter are a few items. One is the Sneakoscope Ron gave me there is also my Omnioculars and the dragon figurine from the TriWizard Tournament. There are also a number of documents you may keep, as long as they remain intact for though I have not touched them in years, I hesitate to destroy legal documents.

Please forgive me, Courtney, for the harshness in this letter.

Sincerely,

Harry Potter

Courtney set the letter down in shock. Tears streamed down her face and she tried futilely to wipe them away. It was as though the parchment had absorbed Harry's pain and anguish and as she read it seeped into her skin. She folded the letter reverently, understanding just how much it had cost Harry to write it.

She then rummaged through the rest of the package, finding the three items mentioned and the documents. Spreading them out she looked at them.

On this date of June, the thirteenth of the year Two-Thousand five, Harry James Potter is hereby declared not guilty of all crimes that he has been previously convicted of. He is granted full pardon by the Ministry of Magic and is certified as a Citizen of the Wizarding World with all the rights and privileges associated...

The document continued giving the official apology and the terms of the reparations. Courtney gasped as she saw the amount of money he was given-it was equivalent to more than 50 million pounds.

The next few documents were the legal releases on all his possessions. The next one was The original letter Harry had written announcing his intention to leave the wizarding world. Then followed Harry's birth certificate as well as his school letters from each year.

Courtney wondered why there were no certificates announcing his award of Order of Merlin, First Class or his appointment to the Wizengamot as Chief Sorcerer, until she realized that the Wizard's Oath that bound the Minister at the time from contacting Harry, similarly prevented the Ministry itself from contacting Harry in any way.

There was one last piece of paper left in the box and Courtney pulled it out, opening the ornate scroll with an elaborate seal on it.

The International Confederation of Wizards, composed of fine societies of witches and wizards throughout the world, in accordance with its founding laws and even more ancient traditions, which have been nobly passed from one generation to another for millennia, do

hereby declare unanimously, by nomination and affirmation of every Magical Government dotting the earth, and without reservation that Harry James Potter receive, and be respected as such evermore, the rights, powers, titles, protections, and artifacts associated with and pertinent to the ancient honor of Merlin's Staff.

David/Harry has discussed his wealth before but has not told the entire truth about it. The fortune he mentions to Kathryn and her parents is actually all inherited from his parents. The Ministry reparation money has sat in a number of bank accounts world wide, virtually untouched, for sixteen years and so has grown considerably.

## Interviews

Courtney picked at her dinner that evening. All she could think about was Harry's letter. The things described in the letter had created horrible images in her head. Nor could she figure out her feelings about her teachers now. They had made a terrible mistake, a terrible misjudgment. She had not thought them capable of it. But then, neither had Harry. She realized that they were human. Wizards did not have all the answers. She wasn't surprised about that, but it infuriated her that they couldn't even properly use what gifts they had for the greater good. A simple five-minute questioning with a truth serum would have been all that was needed to exonerate Harry.

Luckily, Angela was deep into an argument with her cousin about the Quidditch cup and did not notice. As she listlessly sipped her pumpkin juice a shadow fell over her. Startled she looked up to find her Head of House behind her.

"Miss Barnes, would you please accompany me?"

Courtney silently followed her out of the still bustling Great Hall. They arrived at a Gargoyle in the hallway and the transfiguration professor said "Lemon Drops." The statue jumped aside and revealed a moving staircase. When they reached the top, McGonagall opened the door revealing a room with a large desk and a number of chairs and two people, the headmaster and Professor Weasley.

"Ah, thank you Minerva. Please, both of you have a seat. There are a number of things that we need to discuss. First, I understand you did not attend Charms today, Miss Barnes. Is there any particular reason?" Dumbledore peered at her benignly.

Courtney gulped and glanced at Professor Weasley. He raised his eyebrows at her.

"I opened a package and was reading a letter."

"A letter?" Bill Weasley said, "That is not a good excuse for skipping class."

“Was this letter from your...friend?” asked Dumbledore.

Courtney nodded.

“I see. What has he told you now?”

“Everything. This was the last letter of his story.”

Dumbledore suddenly looked years older than he already was. He nodded and asked softly, “And what is your opinion of us now?”

Courtney sighed, “I am not sure. I’d like to believe that everything has changed, that you have learned your lesson, but how can I when you teach lies?”

“Miss Barnes!” Minerva was shocked at the way she was speaking to Albus.

Albus held up a hand. He turned to Bill, “Miss Barnes will have a detention with you tomorrow night at seven for her absence today. Now, would you two please allow Miss Barnes and I to discuss some things privately?”

Looking rather miffed, McGonagall followed Professor Weasley out the door. Dumbledore stood and looked out his window.

“When the board of governors and the ministry decreed that we could not teach the true history of Harry Potter and the Second Dark War, I fought them as hard as I could. I do not like lies. They blind us and limit us. But if I allow the truth to be taught, I will lose my position as Headmaster. This school is my stewardship, it is my duty to the future to give students a direction for their lives. I would leave it to hands of others, if I did not know that Draco Malfoy is slated to be the next headmaster. I cannot, in good conscience, leave the school in his hands. I was ready to leave my duties behind sixteen years ago, when I realized how I had utterly failed everybody. Then a conversation I had with Severus convinced me to stay. I stayed because I was needed. As long as the people need me to serve them, I will do so, despite my belief that I do not deserve their trust.”

The Headmaster sighed and turned to look at Courtney.

"You are correct, we have not changed much. We are still narrow-minded and selfish, without the slightest idea of what our potential is. We are afraid of change and strike at anything that is different or new. Perhaps, if Harry had stayed we would have been able to change our ways. Seeing our mistake right in front of us, it might have forced us to change. But we chose the easy way, to forget, to pretend it didn't happen."

Courtney remained silent, she didn't know how to respond to this...confessional.

Dumbledore sat down behind the desk and looked Courtney in the eye, "Perhaps you have the courage to show us the error of our ways. Hermione came to me with a wonderful idea last month. She wants all of the first years to present their projects to the board of Governors, the rest of the students and to all the parents. The board of governors approved it last week. Invitations are being written up to invite all your parents for a week at Hogwarts when the term starts again in January. And you will present, to the entire assembly, the truth."

Courtney tossed and turned in her sleep that night. She was going to present her report to an audience of parents and Board Members, most of whom had been trying to cover up the information she would present for sixteen years.

She thought about Dumbledore's words, and wondered, not for the first time, why she was the first one to ask questions and find out the truth. That Harry wrote to her was not the major difference, the difference was that she wasn't going to sit back and listen to lies. If anyone else had paid attention to what they were told, or even tried to research Harry just a little bit, they too would have realized that they were being lied to. She realized that, to a point, Dumbledore was right, the wizarding community was narrow-minded and cowardly. They saw the lies there and were just content to leave them. They didn't care that an entire generation was growing up without the knowledge of who had made their peaceful existence possible.

Finally giving up on the prospect of sleep she quietly made her way out of the room and down the stairs to the common room where she started making some notes on what she might say in an oral presentation.

Halfway through her second sentence she dropped her quill as she realized that something Dumbledore said should not have been true.

He had mentioned that Draco Malfoy was slated to become the next Headmaster of Hogwarts if Dumbledore left. Thinking back she remembered Tiberius bragging that his father was on the school board.

But Draco Malfoy had been a Death Eater. Shouldn't he have been locked up?

She fell asleep half an hour later pondering the question.

The next morning she hurried down to breakfast and was glad to see Professor Dumbledore there already. She approached him at the high table.

"Miss Barnes, what can I do for you?" the headmaster smiled at her.

"Is there sometime when I could talk to you? I have a few questions."

Dumbledore thought for a moment and then answered, "Come to my office during lunch and we can talk then. Will that work?"

Courtney nodded and then walked over to sit next to Angela and Caleb. Or rather, to sit between Angela and Caleb. They were now refusing to speak to each other because Caleb had insulted (or rather Angela took it as an insult) the Chudley Cannons and it had escalated into a shouting match right before breakfast. Monica (their cousin who was a fifth year prefect) had taken five points from them and so now the two were just fuming. This, of course, made Courtney very uncomfortable so she ended up eating very quickly and hurrying out of the Great Hall.

On her way out, she saw Professor Granger in the hallway talking to someone at the door. She couldn't tell who it was because the light shining from the rising sun made it impossible to distinguish an identity. Hermione must have heard her footsteps because she turned around.

"Courtney, come here for a moment please," she called.

Courtney did so and found the other person, upon closer inspection, to be Ron Weasley. She greeted him then turned to Hermione, waiting for her to say why she had called her over there.

"Ron's team is having a game this weekend against the Kenmare Kestrels. The headmaster has given permission for Angela to attend with me, but we have a few extra tickets. Caleb will probably come, but I was also wondering if you would like to come."

Courtney's eyes widened in surprise. When a teacher asks to speak to you, it isn't normally an invitation to a Quidditch game, "I...I'd love to!"

Hermione grinned, "I'll talk to the Headmaster. You'll most likely spend Friday night with us and go to the game Saturday. Just don't spread the word around very far. Other students might get jealous." Courtney nodded in agreement, her mind already planning on asking Ron and Hermione a few questions Friday night if she could.

Now she just had to find a time to talk to Sirius. This wasn't a problem of course, as Defense was today, but she was now eager to ask questions of them, to find out their side of the story.

At lunch Courtney hurried up to the Headmaster's office. The door at the top of the stairs was open and Dumbledore was seated in a chair beside a low table upon which sat a tray of sandwiches and a pitcher of lemonade (which surprised Courtney, she had not seen that beverage since she had entered the Wizarding World.)

Dumbledore noticed her surprise and chuckled, ending with a small cough, "I have a liking for lemons. Now what would you like to talk about?" he asked as he invited her to eat.

Picking up a sandwich, she decided to address the Draco Malfoy issue first.

“You said that Draco Malfoy would become the next Headmaster if you left, right?”

He nodded, taking a sip on his lemonade.

“Why isn’t Draco Malfoy in jail? Wasn’t he a Death Eater?”

“There was never enough proof to put him behind bars.”

Courtney looked at him in disbelief and blurted out the first thing that came to mind, “Since when does the wizarding world need proof?” Then, realizing what she had said, she slapped her hand over her mouth.

Dumbledore glanced at her amused and answered, “Perhaps I should rephrase my answer, he bought enough people off so that they didn’t pursue what little proof there was. Even now, our Ministry is riddled with corruption and, in politics, money talks.”

“Why was there never any proof?”

“Draco was not a Slytherin for nothing. During the war, he played both sides. He actually informed on Voldemort for our side a few times in an attempt to cultivate favor to cover his tracks should he ever get caught. It worked too. It also helps that there were never any actual witnesses to his crimes. Now many people know exactly what Draco was, but we have no ability to do anything about it.”

Courtney thought for a moment and then said quietly, setting her cup down, “What if I could get proof of his crimes?”

Dumbledore, though he did not move, suddenly became more alert. “What do you mean by that?”

"In the last letter from Harry, he told me that Draco Malfoy was the one who kidnapped him and took him to the forest and took his wand."

Dumbledore's eyes widened, nobody had ever been sure exactly what had happened that night Harry had been arrested. "Miss Barnes, I doubt that it would be taken as conclusive evidence without personal testimony, however, I know a number of people who would be interested to know that fact. Although, with Draco on the Board of Governors, it might not be the best idea to share that piece of information in your oral presentation."

Courtney nodded and then took a deep breath ready to get to the hard part of this discussion.

"Professor, can you tell me why you believed Harry when he told you about the attack on Diagon Alley?"

Immediately the omnipresent twinkle dulled slightly as the headmaster pulled up the old memory. He sighed and looked at his watch, "I will be happy to answer your question, but it is time for you to get to class. Would you join me here for dinner?"

Courtney nodded, a bit disappointed that she would have to wait, but glad that she would find out. Perhaps she would tell Harry since he had never found out either.

In Defense that afternoon they learned about Mummies. They were working through a unit on the undead and they were almost done. They had covered vampires, Waking Skeletons, Zombies and a few others that had never made it into Muggle mythology. The Mummies were the last unit. Sirius had explained that, ghosts, though technically undead, resented being the subject matter for a lesson in Defense Against the Dark Arts.

As the class left the room to go out to Herbology Courtney hung back to talk to Sirius.

"Professor? Is there a time that I could talk to you some more about Harry?"

Sirius looked at her for a moment and then nodded, "Would you like to talk Sunday afternoon?"

Courtney nodded and quickly left.

Albus tiredly rubbed his aching head with both hands. Tonight he felt his age acutely. Courtney had just finished dinner with him and left to attend her detention with Professor Weasley. He sighed and sat back, recalling the words he had said in answer to her previous question.

"I have often relied on instinct, Courtney. That and stubborn will. I wanted to believe Harry was telling the truth. I had no evidence, but I guess...I wanted to believe that there was some redemption for Harry. I wanted to give him a chance to find salvation, to find a way to forgive himself or atone for what he had done. I wanted to believe that he was not completely evil and so I took his word. Of course, I found out soon after that that Harry had no need of redemption. That I had been a fool and that my instincts, however good they may have been that night Harry told me about the attack on Diagon Alley, I should have listened to them ten years before and none of it would have ever happened."

Albus sighed again. It took a lot out of him to tell those things to Courtney. Had he not known the truth about her father he probably would not have told her. It wasn't that he was too proud to admit his mistakes; it was just that there was no one to confess them to. Most of his friends would be uncomfortable if he were to confide in him the way they did in him. He was Albus Dumbledore and everyone, no matter how well they knew him, had expectations and him talking about his mistakes and failings was not one of them.

"It's what you get for the life you have lived, Albus, no one will listen to you," he chided himself aloud.

He stood from his desk, body aching from the stress of the day, but as he did a small smile graced his face as he recalled Courtney's parting statement.

"You know what you said yesterday, that the wizarding world was narrow-minded and selfish? I think you are mistaken to include yourself."

Courtney Barnes was a child, wise and mature beyond her years. She was clumsy and seemed to earn detentions quite frequently, and she was at times a silly child, but at the same time, she seemed older than her peers.

Harry, you and Kathryn did a wonderful job raising your daughter. I'm sure you are doing just as well with your son. But please, Harry, for your sake and her own, let her pursue her dreams and give her your support. Albus begged silently to whatever deity might be listening.

Slowly he made his way from his office to his rooms and fell asleep in exhaustion.

Kathryn and David had come to a comfortable point. David had kept his word and was playing the part of the perfect father for a muggle born. Kathryn wasn't sure how much was an act and how much was genuine, but she was glad for the relief that it brought, even if it was an act. David was, apparently, even getting excited about buying wizarding Christmas presents for the children. He had actually asked Megan Weasley what kinds of things to buy for magical children.

Megan and Kathryn were planning another outing to Diagon Alley and Kathryn even asked David if he would like to go. David declined, citing one of his newest patients as his reason, but suggested Michael might enjoy it. Kathryn was unsure as to why David automatically assumed Michael would be like his sister. She had never noticed any magic in either of them, and, according to Megan, it was uncommon for there to be two witches or wizards in a muggle family. However, she did not ask him, and instead she took it as another sign of his acceptance of Courtney's world.

Friday morning came with the sun trying to peek out of the gloomy cloud cover. It was sure to snow soon. A tap on the kitchen window alerted the occupants of the breakfast table to an owl. The owl was not Rex and as soon as Kathryn removed its letter, it flew back through the open window.

Kathryn turned it over and recognized the seal as that of Hogwarts. Opening it curiously, she read it out loud to her husband and son.

To the Family of Courtney Barnes

You are hereby invited to spend five days at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. You are invited to attend presentations on historical figures in the Wizarding world given by the first year students. If you wish to accept this invitation for January 3-8 please R.S.V.P. as soon as possible and let us know. All parents of Muggleborn students will be given further instructions at a later time, detailing how they are to get to Hogwarts.

We look forward to seeing you.

Minerva McGonagall

Kathryn immediately brightened at the thought of being able to see the school that her daughter had come to love so much. She turned to David, "Well? Would you like to go?"

David silently picked up the letter and read it through again. Then he took out his calendar from his pocket and flipped to the beginning of January.

Then slowly he shook his head, "I can't. I have two surgeries scheduled for that week, plus I have one patient due to finish his current round of chemo that week. I could possibly rearrange some of those, but I also have an appointment on the calendar for Prashanth Siraj. There is no way I can ask his family to reschedule because they are traveling from India to see me."

Disappointed, but trying not to show it, Kathryn looked at him and asked, "If you could, would you go?"

David thought for a moment and then sighed, "I don't know."

Kathryn scowled, nodded sharply, and then hurried to get Michael ready for school.

Courtney could barely contain her excitement on Friday. As soon as classes ended for the day, she ran up to Professor Granger's office. When she arrived, she found Angela there as well as her three younger siblings. Courtney eagerly volunteered to occupy Mariah, while Angela attempted to keep Markus and Harry from killing each other with some very large history books. Hermione was finishing up some last moment things while she waited for Caleb to show up (apparently Caleb and Angela had forgotten all about their fight and were making rather outrageous bets as to who would win.)

When Caleb arrived (five minutes late) Hermione herded them all together and they started walking down to Hogsmeade. Ron was still at practice when they got home so the younger children entertained themselves while the three first years helped Hermione make dinner.

Ron came home exhausted, but pumped for the game the next morning. After dinner while Ron was putting the younger children to bed and Angela and Caleb were arguing about who-knows-what Courtney helped Hermione clean up.

As she cleared the table, she addressed her professor, "Is there sometime I could talk to you and your husband about Harry Potter?" she asked nervously.

Hermione hesitated in the doorway and then continued silently into the kitchen. Courtney thought she wasn't going to answer but then Hermione spoke, "Tonight would probably be best. Although Ron doesn't even know about your contact with Harry so it will be a shock. I...its hard to talk about Harry, so I am sorry if we can't answer some of your questions."

Courtney thought for a moment and then said, "Did you know that Angela hates Harry Potter?"

"What? Where did you get that idea?" Hermione stared at Courtney.

"From Angela. She doesn't like him in the slightest because she doesn't know the truth, all she knows is that him leaving the

Wizarding World hurt you and your husband a lot and so she doesn't like him because of that."

Hermione was silent as she tried to understand this fact. How could Angela hate Harry Potter? There wasn't much you could hate about him. He had always helped others, he had always tried to please. Many times he was noble to a fault. How could Angela hate him?

Because she knows nothing about him. She doesn't know about him stopping Quirrell, slaying the basilisk, saving Buckbeak and Sirius, or anything about the Quidditch World Cup. She knows nothing about Harry Potter!

For the first time in sixteen years, Hermione actually realized what it meant to hide the truth. In her mind, she had known, but as it had not affected her, because she knew the truth, she had never understood the effect it had on those who didn't.

She put the cups in the sink and simply walked out of the kitchen. Courtney sighed and put her armload of dishes in the sink and went into the living room. A few moments later both Hermione and Ron came down the stairs.

"Sorry Courtney, I did not mean to be rude. I just...needed a moment. I think now would be the best time to talk. Although we'll have to explain to Ron."

Ron, looking very confused, turned his attention from his wife to his house-guest.

Courtney sighed, "For my famous wizard project, I chose Harry Potter."

Ron immediately frowned and turned to his wife, "We can't tell her anything!" he muttered, but Courtney could still hear him.

"Mr. Weasley, I researched as much as I could and found next to nothing about Harry. I figured out on my own that Azkaban was once guarded by Dementors and that they were the guards while Harry was there. I knew then that we were being lied to. I figured nobody in

the wizarding world had the guts to tell the truth about what happened, so I would go straight to the source. I wrote to him."

Ron, not knowing what to expect simply raised his eyebrows questioning the wisdom of such an action, given what he knew of past attempts to contact Harry.

"Harry wrote me back and told me everything about himself. He told me how you two first met on the train, how you talked to Aragog in the forest your second year, how your leg was broken when Sirius dragged you to the Shrieking Shack, how your dress robes for the Yule Ball had lace frills, he told me everything."

Ron had stopped listening after her first four words and was staring openmouthed in shock.

"When the new term starts in January and we do our projects, I am going to present the truth, in its entirety, to everybody. The world will know what it owes Harry Potter. The younger generation will know to whom they owe their peace and prosperity." There was a fire of determination in Courtney's eyes that Hermione had never seen before.

Ron finally managed to say, "He wrote back to you?"

"More than that," Hermione spoke up, "He transferred all of his assets through WWW to Courtney. She now owns one-third of the company."

Ron shook himself, making sure this was real, while Hermione continued, "Courtney has asked if she can ask us a few things."

Ron simply looked at Courtney expectantly, waiting for her to ask. Courtney shifted in her seat. Then she simply sighed and took out a piece of parchment and a quill that Professor Dumbledore had provided her with. It would record the interview word for word so she could just talk.

"First I want to ask you, Mr. Weasley, to tell me about your friendship with Harry."

Ron sighed and launched into his tale.

“I grew up hearing the stories about Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived. In all that time I never once realized that he was the same age as me. I never thought that he would go to Hogwarts with me, much less that we would become friends. When Fred and George announced that Harry had been the kid to ask my Mum how to get onto the platform, I realized for the first time that Harry Potter was still a kid! I mean I had always known he wasn’t a grown-up, but I had never consciously understood that that meant he was a kid.

“When I joined him in the train car, to tell you the truth, I was all jittery with nervousness. I mean, I was meeting the famous Harry Potter. I was simply flabbergasted when he started talking to me like a normal person. When he told off Malfoy for insulting me, up to that moment I had never felt more proud. We became fast friends.

“But I...” here Ron paused for a minute to gather his thoughts he continued speaking slower and softer, “I was never as good a friend as he deserved. I had a jealous streak Courtney and that was my problem. Fourth year, I got mad at him because Crouch Jr entered him into the TriWizard tournament. All I could think about was the fame and recognition. I was tired of being overshadowed by first my brothers and then Harry. I was never as good a friend to him as he was to me.

“I didn’t fully realize what it meant to be Harry Potter until the beginning of fifth year. Harry had changed over the summer, he was more somber and more prone to withdrawing. Hermione kept me in line, kept me from blowing up at him in frustration. I was enlisted to get him to Madam Pomfrey when he didn’t get enough sleep.” Ron paused again and looked down at his hands giving a big sigh, “When he started confessing what he saw in his dreams, I sometimes wished he had not told us. It was awful, but I could see it helped him to talk about it and so I tried.

“When I saw who I thought was Harry kill Hagrid, I thought it had to be someone under Polyjuice potion, I did not believe it had been Harry. Then Dumbledore told me it had been Harry, I just wanted to

die. I...I used to blame myself. I thought that because I had wished he would stop telling us what happened he had tried to find another avenue of release. I thought that I should have been more supportive and maybe things would have turned out differently."

Ron went silent and Courtney allowed him a moment before asking, "What was your reaction when Harry killed Voldemort and Dumbledore told everyone about his innocence?"

Ron looked at Courtney, "I felt like throwing up actually. I felt sick at the thought of Harry being innocent and in Azkaban. I knew very well his reaction to Dementors. I tried not to think about it too hard because I was the one who had to break the news to the rest of the family. I knew if I thought about it too much I wouldn't be able to talk about it.

"After I told everyone I became terrified of finding Harry. He would be angry, he would be furious; I didn't know what he would do. I knew I deserved whatever he dished out and so I put off meeting him for a few days. By the time I built up the courage...he was gone. I became obsessed with finding him so I could apologize. But he was gone and there was no way to reach him."

Hermione spoke up, telling her side of the story, "I broke down completely when Ron told me about what had happened in the battle, that Harry was innocent. I was just in shock. Then all I wanted to do was talk to him, plead with him. Beg his forgiveness. When Dumbledore told us that he was leaving the wizarding world, I was nearly hysterical. It...it was an awful time. When you find out you made a huge mistake, a very big misjudgment like that, especially about someone you care about...it hurts. It hurts a lot. And if I know I hurt that much, I can't even imagine how much Harry hurt."

Courtney looked at the couple in amazement and said in an exasperated voice, "Then why would you let lies be taught? You still feel guilty about it, that much is obvious. Do you think Harry would ever forgive you for teaching lies and hiding things? How can you forgive yourself if you continue denying the truth?" Courtney's disgust was easily distinguishable in her voice.

Ron and Hermione stared at her in shock. Immediately Courtney flushed in embarrassment and started stammering out an apology, "Sorry! I should be more respectful."

Hermione let out a deep sigh, "No, it's alright. You've come close to Harry and so you see things how he sees them. You're right. Courtney I...I've been ignoring the truth for sixteen years, I don't want to think about what I did!" the Hermione started crying.

Ron put his arm around his wife and looked at Courtney, "I...I guess I have simply pushed everything away. It seems like that was another lifetime, those memories almost seem like they belong to someone else. I guess I just moved on." Ron shrugged.

Courtney, however, could see that this was blatantly untrue. "Mr. Weasley, you haven't 'moved on' you have simply forced yourself not to think about it, you have not dealt with it." she stated quietly.

Hermione wiped her face, trying to reclaim her dignity, "I think it is time for bed."

Courtney packed up her quill and parchment and prepared to leave the living room, but then she turned around to look at her best friend's parents, "You two aren't the only ones who have buried all of this, refused to think about it."

"What do you mean?" asked Ron standing up from his seat on the couch.

"Harry never dealt with it either, he simply left it behind. He has ignored anything having to do with the wizarding world for sixteen years. His own wife does not know his past. But none of you are happier for it." Once again, Courtney turned to go, but Hermione's voice stopped her, "Harry's married?"

Courtney looked at her history teacher and nodded, "He's been married for probably fourteen years now. He has two children. They are probably slightly older than me by now."

"Do you...do you know anything else about his current life?" Ron asked, a desperate note in his voice. Courtney shook her head and went up to bed.

The next morning snow started falling. It was just a light snow, but it was a very cold day. As the Quidditch fans crowded onto the stands they held their cloaks and coats tight around them. Courtney, Angela and Caleb huddled together as Hermione took out her wand and cast warming charms over them (the three younger ones were with various aunts and uncles today). They sat down and chatted eagerly as they waited for the game to start.

Courtney glanced at Hermione. Both Hermione and Ron had been subdued. It wasn't so much that Caleb and Angela wondered what was going on, but it was noticeable to Courtney.

Cheers erupted as the commentator announced the entrance of the two teams. Courtney pushed aside all thought of her project and concentrated on the game.

Ten minutes into the game, Hermione tapped Courtney on the shoulder and, when she had her attention, pointed something out to her. Courtney squinted in the direction her teacher indicated and gasped in surprise at who she saw.

Her entire family was there. Including her father.

Courtney was practically jumping up and down with excitement as her family mounted the bleachers. She turned, grinning maniacally, to Hermione, "How?" she asked.

"Well, when I told Megan that I was taking you along with Angela and Caleb she thought of inviting your family. Megan and your mother have gotten to be good friends and she thought it might be a fun idea. She called them yesterday afternoon and asked them if they would like to come to the game."

By then the Barnes family were level with their daughter. Courtney picked her way past the few people sitting on the same riser and then ran along the bleacher to her parents and brother. A few feet from

them she slipped on a patch of snow that had formed ice and bashed her shin into the lower bench, falling, none too gracefully into her father's arms.

He let out a small chuckle at his daughter's characteristic clumsiness.  
"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I probably have a bruise though," she rubbed her shin in annoyance and embarrassment as grinned at her family. She immediately found herself in her father's arms as he planted a kiss on her forehead. Then her mother came forward and hugged her as well. Michael did not hug her but instead grinned and showed her where he had lost a tooth. They all made their way back to where the Weasleys sat.

Hermione was surprised to see David Barnes come. According to Sirius, Fred and Megan he was not interested in the wizarding world. She noticed that he purposely sat at the far end of the group, as far away from her as he could. She surmised that he still had no love for the wizarding world. Sighing in frustration at parents who wouldn't support their children, she turned her attention back to the game.

Kathryn had been surprised when Megan had called her on the phone and invited them to a Quidditch game that Courtney had been invited to as well. Kathryn and Michael had immediately agreed. David however, had refused to come. She knew he didn't have any appointments that day and really had nothing else to do so she had insisted that, unless he gave her a good reason why he shouldn't go he would come with him. He had frowned and looked angry for a moment and then Kathryn had simply said "Do you want to see Courtney?" He had simply acquiesced at that. So here he was, sitting at a Quidditch game.

Kathryn sat beside Angela and Caleb and Hermione sat on the other side of the two cousins. Michael sat next to his mother and Courtney was beside her father on Michael's other side. Kathryn watched her husband and daughter. Courtney was absorbed in the game, but David had his arm around her and was looking only at her.

She felt a rush of gratitude that David was here today. Courtney and David had always been close and David's attitude over the past few months had greatly hurt both Courtney and himself. It seemed now though that their relationship, though not quite like it was before, was healing.

The game ended unexpectedly in a tie. 200-200. The Kestrals had been down by 150 bu then had caught the snitch. Ron didn't look happy with his players, but the crowd was pleased with the game overall and there was a contented murmur of voices as the spectators left the stadium. The Weasleys waited patiently while the Barneses said goodbye.

"Thank you for coming!" Courtney was still grinning.

"Why wouldn't we come, sweetie? Of course we wanted to see you!" Kathryn laughed lightly, ignoring the voice in her head that pointed out that David had not wanted to come.

"When does your term end for Christmas?" David asked.

"Um, around the 16th I believe." Courtney looked around to confirm this with Hermione who nodded.

"Yeah, the sixteenth. I'll be riding the train back to King's Cross and I should be there about 6 PM."

"We'll see you then." David said and hugged Courtney once more, "I love you."

"Love you to, Dad." After receiving similar good-byes from Michael and Kathryn, Courtney followed the Weasleys and the Barnes family went in the opposite direction to where Fred Weasley was waiting to take them back home.

The rest of the day was lazy for Courtney. She didn't really have any homework to do that weekend, except for her project, which she was at a standstill on. She had all of Harry's information in report format and was now just waiting for the last interview with Sirius.

Sunday afternoon she walked to Professor Black's office. She knocked and entered when he invited her in.

"Right on time. I heard you went to the Quidditch game yesterday. How did you like your first professional match?"

Courtney grinned, "Well, I liked it a lot, but it was freezing cold. I think I prefer school games though, because I actually know the players and stuff."

Sirius smiled and motioned for her to sit down.

"So your parents and brother showed up?" Sirius said sitting down himself.

"Yeah! That was a complete surprise. I mean, especially that my Dad came."

"Well Courtney, he told you he would try and he obviously is trying."

"I guess so, but I don't think he watched a single bit of the game. I think he was watching me the entire time."

Sirius smiled and then sat back and said, "So what is it you wanted to ask me about Harry?"

"Well, first, just tell me about him from your perspective," Courtney said as she set out the parchment and quill.

"Well, I hardly remembered him before I saw the article in the Daily Prophet about the Weasleys winning that galleon draw and recognized Wormtail. The dementors sucked those memories of Harry out of me." Sirius' eyes lost something when he talked about Azkaban. "When I finally remembered about Harry, I didn't let myself forget. That is what gave me the...drive to escape. I watched him as best I could that year. When we finally met...it was not in the best situation as I am sure he told you. I was stunned that he opened up to me so fast and invited me into his life so completely, even more so when I discovered how little he trusted anybody. I was the only adult he ever turned to for a long time. What kind of a life did he have, it

made me wonder, to guard himself so much and at the same time be so willing to trust someone who was almost an absolute stranger? But we still didn't know each other. Our longest conversation was probably when I got to talk to him on his fifteenth birthday and that wasn't more than two hours. I hardly knew him at all. He trusted me without knowing me but I couldn't trust him. That is one reason why I believed the lies. I had known and trusted Remus and Albus for decades but I didn't know my godson."

Ok, before anyone gets any strange ideas, let me explain. Angela and Caleb fight like siblings not like Ron and Hermione do in the books, where it is interpreted as romantic interest.

They are first cousins, and while that was once acceptable in the Muggle world (and presumably even longer in the magical world), it no longer is.

## Chapter 18—Christmas Confessions

Courtney sighed in relief as she placed her report on the life of Harry Potter in Professor Granger's hands. It had been a lot of work and she was proud of it. She suspected her report was more than a little bit longer than Hermione (she had been calling her by her first name in her head for weeks now since she felt she knew her so well from Harry's letters) had been expecting, but she didn't think the teacher would complain, given her own love of history.

"Now remember, you should have already created your outline for your oral presentation," Hermione reminded the class as they prepared to leave the room. "I don't require you to turn them in to me; however if you want me to look them over I can and will make suggestions on how to improve them. Remember your presentations are to be a minimum of twenty minutes. You will be graded on this presentation, although it is not as big a percentage of your grade as your paper. I will return your papers to you as soon as school resumes so you know your grade. And now," Hermione relaxed slightly and smiled, "since this is our last class before the break, have a very Happy Christmas." All the children cheered at this statement and responded in kind.

Courtney, accompanied by Caleb and Angela, walked happily to the Great Hall for dinner. There seemed to be a silent agreement among all the first years not to talk about their reports or their upcoming oral presentations. Instead, they all chattered about what they would do on their holidays and how much they wanted to see their respective families. Since most students were going home for Christmas they had the holiday feast that night.

As the feast wound down, Professor McGonagall addressed them all, apologizing that the headmaster was not there, as he was feeling a little under the weather, and wished them a safe and happy holiday. Then she dismissed them to finish their packing and head off to bed.

Walking back up to the Gryffindor tower Courtney turned to her two companions, "Why do you think the Headmaster wasn't there?"

Caleb shrugged, "McGonagall said he wasn't feeling well."

Courtney furrowed her eyebrows, "He hasn't been feeling well for a while, has he? I mean, he didn't look all that good a month ago. He looked really sick three weeks ago," Courtney insisted.

Caleb shrugged again and opened his mouth to give another placating answer, when Angela spoke up, "I heard Mum, Sirius and Remus all talking last week. They are all worried. The Headmaster has always been in the best of health. Now though, it's like he has a flu, but none of Pomfrey's stuff is working."

Caleb rolled his eyes, "Everybody gets sick once in a while. And you know there are magical-resistant sicknesses that just have to run their course. You're overreacting." On that note, they entered the common room and retired to their rooms to finish all the last minute packing.

The next morning, Courtney excitedly dragged her trunk to the front hall. Not only would she be seeing her family again, this would be her first ride on the Hogwarts Express. She and Angela had already exchanged gifts, as they wouldn't be seeing each other over the holiday. Angela had given her a book about everyday charms and she had given Angela a book about a Quidditch star named Thomas Abernathy, who happened to be related to Angela through her paternal grandmother. Caleb was riding the train and so they claimed a car on the train and were soon joined by a number of other Weasley cousins. The ride was a lot of fun and Courtney bought everyone sweets from the cart. As they ate the treats their conversation somehow naturally found its way to the topic of the first years' projects. Most of the older students agreed that if it got them out of class, it was a good thing. Courtney and Caleb, although they didn't quite agree with the others, were both excited to present their projects.

Caleb had ended up choosing Albus Dumbledore for his project and amused the other car occupants with stories about various incidences in the Headmaster's tenure.

As Courtney picked up a chocolate frog Monica turned and addressed her, "Who did you do your project on?"

“Harry Potter,” Courtney answered in what she hoped was a casual manner.

“Oh,” Justina piped up from where she was trying to keep Jared and Jonathan from stealing all her candy, “I did him on my project.”\*

“Really?” Courtney asked intrigued, “Did you have any trouble finding information?”

Justina shrugged, “Not really, I mean there are a lot of books about him. Why, did you have trouble?”

Courtney rolled her eyes, “You bet I had trouble. All those books about him in the library all say the same thing and none of them give any detail. None of them even says which house he was in.”

Everyone was now paying attention to Courtney. Justina looked only mildly curious, and said with a shrug, “I guess that much isn’t known about him.”

Courtney let out a great guffaw. “Not much known about him? You really think that? Justina, your own mother had a huge crush on Harry until she was twelve and then she dated him for a few months in her fourth year. He was best friends with Ron ever since they first got on the train together first year and Hermione a few months later. He was the initial investor in Weasley Wizard Wheezes, and up until a few months ago, he still owned one-third of the company. For a time he considered Molly Weasley his mother. ‘Not much known about him’ my foot!” Courtney laughed again. Everyone was staring at her. Caleb gave a little snicker.

Justina looked as though she could not decide to be offended at the vocal barrage or interested to know more, evidently thought she chose the latter, “He dated Mum? Are you sure you know what you are talking about? Mum has never mentioned that she even really knew Harry Potter. I mean, yes they went to school at the same time...” Justina trailed off as Courtney buried her head in her hands and moaned.

“Justina, Harry Potter saved your mother’s life when she was a first year, he stayed at the Burrow twice during the summer, sharing a room with Ron. Yes, your mother knew Harry Potter.” She stood and moved to her trunk and opened it a crack to fish for something. She pulled it out and handed it to Justina. It was one of the more recent pictures Harry had sent her, taken at Christmas in his fifth year. Justina’s eyes went wide as she saw her mother kissing a man, that was not her father, under the mistletoe. The others demanded to see the picture and as it got passed around it got a number of different reactions.

Jennifer Weasley+ had a serious look on her face as she gazed at the picture. Passing it on to Monica she looked at Courtney, “How much do you know about Harry Potter?”

Courtney was startled at the serious tone of voice and everyone else seemed to notice it as well because they suddenly stopped their talking and turned to Jennifer.

“A lot, why?”

“No, how much do you know about Harry Potter?”

Courtney gave Jennifer a confused look while her mind raced. What was this all about?

Finally she decided to answer honestly, “Everything.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean, I know everything. All the details from his time at Hogwarts, the details of the night he was framed for the murder of Rubeus Hagrid, the details of the trial. I know all about his years in prison and everything about the final battle, how he killed Voldemort and saved the headmaster’s life. I know he was awarded the Order of Merlin First Class as well as Merlin’s Staff.”

Jennifer’s face darkened considerably. “Who told you?”

Courtney raised an eyebrow, “Why do you care?”

"I was accepted into the Pre-Law Enforcement program. We are given certain...confidential information. I want to know how you got your information. Whoever told you is probably going to have some legal troubles."

Courtney shook her head, "No one you know."

"Courtney, who gave you that information?" Jennifer looked both angry and scared. She and two others had been attending the Law Enforcement program since Mid-July when they had been accepted. She was the youngest one—the only one not graduated yet. It had been a very big honor because she was only the second recruit ever chosen before graduation. Only a month ago they had finally been approved to learn some confidential information. She, Lindsey and Robert had sat in a warded room while her father (the Minister of Magic), the head of the Aurors, and the director of Ministry intelligence told them some of the highly guarded secrets of the Ministry's past. They were told that the information would be Obliviated were they to drop out of the program or be rejected for further advancement. They were given the strictest orders not to reveal what they were told.

Now here she was, listening to an eleven year old speak those secrets. And the others in the compartment were watching the conversation as though it were a spectator sport, heads turning from one side to the other.

"There is nothing the Ministry can do to my source. My source is untouchable by the laws restricting the truth." Courtney said defiantly.

Jennifer truly looked angry now, "The Ministry is the government, and of course it can do something. Who is your source?" she yelled.

Courtney laughed, "Harry Potter is my source. He and I have been in correspondence since half-way through September. He simply told me about his life." Courtney looked at Jennifer's shocked face, no trace of her laugh now, "And I am going to present my oral presentation using the full truth, not the lies and cover-ups that the ministry forces Hogwarts to teach."

Everyone, save Patricia and Caleb, who already knew, were staring open mouthed. Jennifer spluttered, "He...he wrote to you?"

"I wrote to him and he answered my letter."

Caleb snorted, "He did more than that."

Jennifer looked at her cousin sharply, "What do you mean by that?"

Courtney rolled her eyes and stuck her tongue out at Caleb then sighed and turned to answer Jennifer, "He means that Harry Potter gave me his entire share of Weasley Wizard Wheezes. Fred and George told me in Hogsmeade on Halloween. I own 1/3 of the company."

All those who had not previously known this, were staring in amazement. Jennifer shook herself. She closed her eyes and leaned her head back against the seat. "This will not be good. Courtney you can't share all this information! It is confidential."

"It's only confidential because everyone in the wizarding world is a coward. Tell me, Jennifer, just what is so wrong about keeping the truth in the memory of society?" Courtney snapped, tired of the attitude that was so pervasive.

Jennifer's mouth opened once...twice without a sound coming out. She had no answer to that. All the explanations that had sounded so reasonable coming from the Intelligence Minister's mouth flew out of her head. The others in the compartment were all pondering on this question as well, even though they did not know all the information Jennifer knew but only what Courtney had stated.

Caleb cleared his throat and Courtney turned to him, "Are you going to eat that chocolate frog?" he asked pointing to the one Courtney had set down when she had fished in her trunk for the picture.

It was a relief when the train finally pulled into Kings Cross Station that evening. After the conversation, Jennifer had withdrawn from the

group and sat beside the window for a long time, thinking. The others had held quiet, tense conversations.

Courtney lugged her trunk out of the compartment and found a cart to put it and Rex's cage on. The owl glared at her as the cart jarred over the pavement, but as girl and cart crossed the barrier at Platform 9 and  $\frac{3}{4}$ , Rex hooted eagerly at the sight of familiar faces. Kathryn, David, and Michael were all there to greet her and she pushed the cart faster to reach them.

She hugged her mother and father, and received a kiss from both and then hugged her little brother who scowled at the indignity of being hugged by his sister.

The first thing Courtney noticed on the ride home, was the easy atmosphere that permeated the car. There was none of the awkwardness and border-line hostility that had been so apparent back in August and her father, though he only asked one question of her, seemed to enjoy the conversation she and Kathryn had about her term.

Michael would pipe up every so often in the conversation, but after a while he fell asleep in his seat and Kathryn and Courtney were allowed to continue their conversation uninterrupted. Kathryn asked a lot of questions about how her classes were going, about the teachers, about magic in general. She was particularly interested in Hogwarts itself and confessed her excitement at being able to go. Courtney opened her mouth to ask her father if he was coming, but Kathryn cut her off with a question about her project.

Courtney smiled, "You'll just have to see. I want it to be a surprise. It would be boring if you had to hear my presentation twice."

"Well, who did you do your project on?" Kathryn asked in an exasperated tone.

"Harry Potter, I thought you knew that much."

"Harry Potter? He's the one that gave you that company, right?"

Courtney nodded and the conversation turned to the snow that had just started falling again outside.

After putting her trunk in her room, Courtney joined her parents for a quick dinner and got to help finish decorating the living room. Then she went to bed.

To her own surprise, she woke up early the next morning. Walking downstairs, she found only her father awake. He was eating breakfast early, though he was not working that day. He ate a bowl of cereal as he read the newspaper.

He smiled at her as she came in, "You're up early,"

Courtney shrugged, "I guess I'm used to early breakfast before classes start. My inner alarm clock is all wrong for holiday break."

Her father stood up, turned to the refrigerator to refill his orange juice, and asked her, "Can I get you something for breakfast?"

"No thanks. After all my meals being served for three months, I feel like doing it myself."

Her father chuckled as she proceeded to fry herself some eggs. He returned to his newspaper. In a few minutes Courtney sat down with a plate of eggs, a slice of toast, and a glass of orange juice. She took a sip of her drink and smiled in a very satisfied manner.

"I have not had orange juice since August."

David glanced at her and raised an eyebrow.

"We have pumpkin juice at Hogwarts," she explained.

"Do you like pumpkin juice?"

"It is good, but I wish they had orange juice."

"Why don't you ask for it?"

Courtney stared at him for a moment and then laughed, “Did you know that that never crossed my mind?”

Silence reigned for a few moments before Courtney nervously proposed a question, “Dad? Can I ask you some questions?”

David seemed to hesitate for a moment before he set down his newspaper and looked at his daughter waiting.

Courtney sighed and poked her fork at her eggs. Still looking down she asked, “Why don’t you like magic?”

David sighed, “Courtney...I,” he hesitated and took a drink, “I...I am still having some trouble completely accepting magic,” he said slowly, “It has a lot to do with some things I am not ready to talk about.” He paused again and Courtney looked up at him. He met her eyes as he said, “Courtney, please believe me, I am trying. I just haven’t finished sorting out a few issues.”

Courtney looked away, slightly hurt by his still prevailing attitude. She played with her food for a moment then asked, “Will you be coming to Hogwarts in January?”

David sighed and answered, “I can’t I have a busy schedule that week.”

Courtney scowled and proceeded to quickly finished her breakfast and retreat to her room.

As the days progressed, Courtney and David were walking on eggshells around each other. Kathryn wasn’t quite sure as to the specifics of the conversation her husband and daughter had had, but she knew that it had triggered the tense atmosphere. Not wanting to cause even more strife, she simply ignored it and did her best to prepare for a happy Christmas.

Christmas eve though, her attempt almost failed. David got a phone call early that morning saying that his patient from India was going to have to postpone his visit for two weeks due to some travel problems. That meant that he was only occupied with work on the third and

fourth—meaning he could easily come to Courtney’s presentation as they were going to be presented over a span of four days and Courtney was the last because they were going in reverse alphabetical order.

When Kathryn found out she immediately confronted David, “Well, you don’t have an excuse. I am sure they can easily arrange later travel for you. Are you coming or not?”

David’s face looked set in stone and, for the first time in many years, Kathryn saw the man he had been when they first met.

“Let’s discuss this after tomorrow.” He said sharply.

Though Kathryn knew that this response most likely indicated a “no” from him, she backed down because it honestly scared her when he became that emotionless shell again.

Christmas morning dawned bright with the sun glinting off the snow and the snowmen and women that had been made previously. Michael obligingly woke everybody else up as soon as he was awake and they all stumbled downstairs to the living room.

The Barnes’ had a tradition that Kathryn’s family had had when she was young. They first opened all their stockings and at whatever candy they liked and played with their little toys. Then they ate a full breakfast consisting of fruit, bacon, eggs, pancakes, waffles, applesauce, and sausage. Afterwards they returned to the living room to open their presents, an experience which they savored by opening each present individually.~

Courtney was surprised to find a number of wizarding presents from her parents. She was not sure if her father had had anything to do with the purchasing of the items though. Michael also had received some wizarding presents, including some WWW merchandise from his sister.

One of Courtney’s presents was a bag that could hold all her books, but that had a feather-light charm on it. The strange thing was, she hadn’t remembered ever seeing something of that sort sold in stores.

What got her most excited though, was the model galaxy her parents gave her. With that, she wouldn't have to get up for midnight Astronomy classes, but instead use the model to do her observations. Inwardly she wondered how much it had cost; she had heard that they were very expensive.

All in all, the whole family had a wonderful Christmas day. That evening they went to Kathryn's parents' house for dinner and a party with family and friends. To Courtney's surprise Benjamin Jones, a Ravenclaw in her year, was there. He was a half-blood and, evidently, his father was a close business associate of Kathryn's brother, Jacob.

Upon finding out that their children were both gifted Benjamin's parents, Norman and Luna struck up a conversation with the Barneses in a secluded corner of the living room. Kathryn found out that Luna<sup>^</sup> was a witch, but that Benjamin, their youngest and only one still at home, was the only one of their eight children to be magical.

The party dwindled but both the Barnes family and the Jones family could be found talking adamantly on a couch in the living room. At least, Kathryn, Luna and Norman were talking. David seemed to be brooding on one cushion of the couch. As the group realized that they would need to cut their conversation short, they stood and exchanged pleasantries.

Luna, who seemed completely oblivious to David's entire demeanor, stuck out a hand to shake his. David looked at her in disbelief and then, reluctantly extended his own hand.

Luna Jones peered at his hand interestedly for a moment and then looked directly into David's eyes and said, "You don't know where you belong." Then she withdrew her hand and followed her husband and son out the door.

David stood there blinking in astonishment.

The next morning Kathryn got up early in order to catch her husband before the children woke up. She found him in his usual spot in the

kitchen, reading his newspaper. This morning he was sipping a mug of hot chocolate.

“David, we are going to talk now about Hogwarts. Are you going or not?”

David shut the newspaper in a very decisive manner and said, in a short tone, “No.”

Kathryn narrowed her eyes and said through clenched teeth, “Why not?”

“I don’t want to.” He said in an equally angry tone.

Kathryn was about to answer back when they heard a sob from the doorway. They both turned and saw Courtney’s back retreating down the hall and back up the stairs to her room.

Kathryn was now angrier than David had ever seen her; she suddenly lashed out and slapped him across the face. “I don’t care anymore if you don’t tell me. But you had better go up there right now and talk to Courtney. She deserves to know why you are acting like such a complete git. I don’t want to see your face until you have worked out your problems and made this up to Courtney.” Kathryn’s voice had risen progressively and by the end she was shouting at her stunned husband, who had one hand to the cheek she had slapped. Then she stormed out of the room and shut herself up in the library.

David sat there at the table for a good half an hour. Then he slowly stood and walked to the closet to retrieve his coat. Then he left the house. For three hours, he aimlessly walked the park. The ground was covered in snow and the lake was frozen over. Only a few skaters were out today. He cleared a spot on the bench and sat down. He held his head in his hands and desperately tried to figure out what he should do.

Around five o’clock that afternoon, the door slowly opened and David Barnes slowly entered the house. He hung up his coat and then squared his shoulder as he walked up the stairs. Kathryn, her eyes red from crying, watched him from her seat in the living room.

There was a knock on Courtney's bedroom door. "Come in, " she said, putting down one of the books she got for Christmas. The door opened to reveal her father.

"Can we talk?"

She nodded with a guarded look in her eyes.

"I'm sorry Courtney....I...."

"You said you were trying!. So try now to come to Hogwarts."

"I can't go to Hogwarts honey. I can't," David Barnes looked desperate and...scared. It was the first time that Courtney had ever seen her father look scared.

"Why can't you?" Courtney could feel the tears start again.

David stiffened and looked away from his daughter.

"I...I'm not ready."

"What do you mean? Please Daddy, I want you to come, please come."

David sat down in Courtney's desk chair and put his head in his hands. His thoughts were racing.

"I..."

He stopped. He was silent for a few minutes. Then he looked at Courtney and she could see he was also crying.

"This is so hard for me to say. Courtney, I.... You are not the first witch I have known." He said suddenly in a rush. He wasn't looking at her anymore, "My mother was a witch, my father a wizard."

"What?" Courtney asked in disbelief.

"I love you Courtney. I was afraid that they might do to you what they did to me," her father said in a choked voice.

"What do you mean by that? Who is they and what did they do?"

"You know what I am talking about; you know what they did to me. I've been telling you since you first wrote to me in September," her father said in a voice barely above a whisper.

Courtney froze as she finally understood what her father was trying to say. She stared at him as all the pieces fell into place and she finally understood her father's actions.

She started sobbing again. A few moments later she felt his arms surround her and she moved to hold onto him. For a long time they just held each other. Finally Courtney sniffed and drew back a little to look at her father. He had tears streaming down his face. He gently kissed her on the forehead and wiped her tears.

"I love you Courtney, but I have been trying to forget my past for so long...it isn't easy. It hurts a lot to remember. I thought it would be enough to tell you my story, but it isn't. I know it isn't enough. But I can't move anymore; I can't move any closer. I'm sorry Courtney, I can't go back, I can't accept them."

Courtney hugged her father closer in response and said, "I love you Daddy. I love you Harry."

Her father started crying again as he heard her frank forgiveness that she offered and the name he had not gone by in sixteen years.

\*Remember, the first-years have been doing these projects for a number of years, this though, is the first time that they have ever done oral presentations to a mass group. (Previously, they would simply do a short presentation before their classmates.)

+Ok, I figured out I had to change Jennifer's age slightly. She is 17 and in her seventh year, I will go back to my "Logistics" page later and change it. Hmm, may as well make her Head Girl.

~Just thought that would be fun to put in there, it has been my family's traditional Christmas morning schedule for as long as I can remember. Of course the breakfast isn't usually that big...although it all sounds really good at the moment (Sorry I'm a bit hungry and I didn't bring lunch to work....)

^Don't even ask me how Luna got into this story. She just walked in looking a little lost and wouldn't leave. Do you ever have characters who suddenly jump in to the story without an invitation?

A/N Hope you liked the chapter! The next one is the one that everything has been building up to—or rather the one in which something will happen to force Harry to make his final choice. I hope to finish with it quickly.

## Chapter 19

Kathryn breathed a sigh of relief as she saw David and Courtney emerge, David's arm around Courtney's shoulder. Both had obviously been crying, but it looked like they had worked things out. She stood from the couch as they walked in and asked just one question, "Are you coming to Hogwarts?"

Kathryn's heart sank as she saw a trapped look cross his face. She felt her previous anger re-emerge. However, before she could say anything Courtney spoke up, "No he is not coming, but it's okay Mum."

Kathryn looked hard at her daughter and then said in a soft voice, "Courtney, run on back upstairs. I need to talk to your father."

Courtney gave her father a quick hug and then went back to her room. David followed Kathryn to the library with some trepidation.

After the door closed Kathryn turned and addressed her husband in a hard tone, "I told you to work out your problems, not convince Courtney that it was okay for you to duck this responsibility. You have no excuse! You have no reason not to go. This is your responsibility and duty as a parent to support your children. You will come with us; this is your family David!"

"No! You don't understand, I can't go to Hogwarts!" David shouted.

"Then tell me why!"

David stopped short, looking terrified, then he plopped down in a chair and covered his face. Kathryn stood glaring at him with her arms folded across her chest. Then, still looking at his hands he spoke softly, "Do you remember when you asked me why I had no friends and I answered that it was because my friends betrayed me? That I had been expelled from school and kicked out of the community?"

Kathryn slowly unfolded her arms and sat down, waiting for her husband to continue. It was not often that he talked about his past

and Kathryn had respected that for a long time. If he was going to talk about it now she would listen without interrupting.

"Kathryn, the school I was expelled from was Hogwarts. It was the wizarding world that betrayed me. My friends? They all thought the worst of me when I needed them the most. That is why this is so hard. Do you remember what I was like when you first met me? Do you remember how long it took me to function like a normal human being? That is what the wizarding world did to me. I cannot go back to Hogwarts Kathryn, I am not ready."

To say Kathryn was stunned or amazed would be a gross understatement. She sat there for a long time simply staring, not moving, not making a sound. Then she said in a quivery voice, "You're a wizard?"

David nodded.

Kathryn shook her head in confusion, "Why did you never tell me?" There was a hint of anger as she looked at him in disbelief.

David looked at his hands once more, "I wanted to forget. I wanted to completely put that life behind me; I wanted to forget I ever held a wand. I wanted to runaway from what happened. I succeeded for sixteen years. And then...." He trailed off and stood up. He walked over to the window and, while still looking out at the dark night, said, "I don't know where I belong, Kathryn. I don't know who I am."

Kathryn joined him at his side and said softly, "You are David Barnes and you belong with your family."

David looked down at his wife, emotions racing across his face. He kissed her gently and then turned to leave the library.

"David, one last time, will you come to Hogwarts?"

David, halfway to the door, turned around to look at her, "I'm sorry Kathryn. I can't."

Courtney could tell there had been a slight uneasiness between her parents for the past few days, but her father had told her that Kathryn now knew he was a wizard, but that he was still not going to go to Hogwarts.

Her father. Harry Potter.

It still boggled her mind. She had come to love and respect Harry Potter as a friend. She had turned to him when her own father had hurt her. To find out that they were one and the same person.... She shook her head as she finished folding her robes and placed them in her trunk. She reflected briefly on her feelings the day after Christmas. Her first reaction to her father's revelation, to his surprise as well as her own, was not anger, but gratitude. As she thought about it, she realized that it was because she had finally known that her father truly did love her. That he didn't hate her. That he was trying for her sake. He was fighting his personal demons because he loved her. True, he had hit a stumbling block at the moment, a rather large one known as Hogwarts, but now that she knew the truth, all of it, she could be patient with him.

"Courtney, Mummy thays to hurry," Michael lisped through his missing teeth. Courtney nodded and stacked her books in her trunk. Then she stood up (shaking her asleep legs) and closed and locked it. Michael helped her drag it downstairs.

Her mother helped her take it to the car while her father helped Michael into the car and got it warmed up. They rode in silence to King's Cross, until Courtney, inexplicably, started giggling.

Kathryn turned around in her seat and raised one eyebrow while David glanced back at her through his rearview mirror.

"Sorry!" she managed through her giggles, "I just realized something!" She attempted to calm herself and once she had been marginally successful, she addressed her father, "Dad, do you know what the Sorting Hat was talking about when it said I had a rare talent?" She needed to confirm her suspicions.

David grimaced, "You're a parselmouth, like me. That is what the Hat was talking about."

Courtney nodded and smiled, No wonder Snape had been acting strangely! She had just realized she must have been speaking in parseltongue when she had her detention with him.

"What's a parselmouth?" Kathryn asked, slightly annoyed.

"A person who can talk to snakes," David and Courtney answered in unison.

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Courtney waved one last time to her family before she crossed the barrier of Platform 9 ¾. On the other side she quickly joined up with the Weasley clan and found a car. As the train started moving she pulled Jennifer aside and asked her, "Did you tell anyone?"

Jennifer scowled, "No I did not tell my father if that is what you are worried about. I made the mistake of talking to Uncle George first and he has now blackmailed me into not saying anything. Added to that is the threat of me being the guinea pig for some of the WWW's newest stock. So, no, I thought it prudent to not tell my father."

Courtney bit her lip in order to keep herself from laughing. Jennifer haughtily joined the rest of the compartment and didn't look at Courtney for the entire journey back to Hogwarts.

That evening after dinner the Headmaster, now looking as healthy as ever, announced that parents and families would be arriving in two days. He asked them all to be on their best behavior as the school Governors would be there as well as a number of Ministry Officials.

"Tomorrow you will all be given schedules," he continued, "for your classes this week. Some classes will be normal length, others will be shortened and others will be canceled all together. Let me also remind you older students—you are expected to attend the presentations as well. If you opt not to come you will remain in a class room for a teacher-supervised study period." There were a few

groans from the upper years at this. "And now, I bid you all goodnight!"

The students all trudged upstairs, tired from the long journey that day. Courtney fell asleep, dreaming of playing wizards chess with her father.

The next morning at breakfast Professor McGonagall handed out schedules to each of them. Courtney noticed that they had all their classes today. The periods were shortened considerably, but they would be seeing all their teachers. In History though, they all received some unpleasant news.

"Over the holiday we made a slight change in the presentation schedule." Hermione announced, "We decided to go in random order. Your names were chosen out of a hat and that is the order you will be presenting in." Then she proceeded to pass out slips on which their assigned times were written.

There was a very loud exclamation of anger from Gary Patil as he discovered that, far from being safely in the middle, he would be the first person to present. Courtney, encouraged by the fact that she was not first, looked at her slip.

January 5, 2:00 pm.

So she wouldn't be going until the second day of presentations\*. She breathed a sigh of relief as she looked around at the others' reactions. Angela was giving her mother death glares. Evidently, Angela had been looking forward to being second (Caleb was supposed to have gone first) but she would now be presenting dead last.

The rest of the day passed in somewhat of a blur for the first year students who were (if they had not been already) getting incredibly nervous. Most could be found hunched over stacks of Proctor's Perfect Speech Q-Cards (which would give verbal queues to the presenter that only he or she could hear) in their spare time. Most of them were too wound up with excitement and anxiety that evening to go to bed at a reasonable time.

However, they eventually fell asleep with thoughts of their families arriving the next evening. Courtney confessed to Angela that her father would not be coming, but Michael and her mother were. Angela huffed, asking why David Barnes was not coming and Courtney just shrugged and gave her a small little smile.

(AN: \*The parents arrive on January 3. Presentations are given January 4-7 and the parents leave January 8.)

Albus sighed as he entered his office. It had been his idea to rearrange the presentation schedule. He didn't think he would be able to wait all week for the Courtney's presentation. As much fun as it would be for her presentation to be the finale, he didn't want to take any chances of particular key people not being there. He knew there were many officials who would see it a waste of time to show up the last day. There were probably some who would have come the last day but left before the Harry Potter presentation because the "knew" everything about him. No they couldn't afford for Courtney Barnes' presentation to be last.

Albus allowed himself a small smile. Yes, they had put all the names in a hat to rearrange the order—however it wasn't as random as the students had been led to believe. The "hat" had happened to be the sorting hat. Albus picked up a sherbet lemon as he walked to his rooms.

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Kathryn's belongings were already in the living room and she was helping Michael pack a few items for their stay at Hogwarts. The six year old was far too excited about going to his sister's school to pay any attention to his mother's questions about what he wanted to take. Kathryn gave up after a few minutes and just packed whatever she felt like of his items.

In early December, they had received a note saying that Fred and Megan Weasley had volunteered to help the Barneses get to Hogwarts. Megan had telephoned her saying that they would arrive at the house at noon on January 3rd and they would use the public floo to get to Hogsmeade and from there walk up to Hogwarts. Kathryn

looked distractedly at her watch and noticed that it was quarter till. She told Michael to go to the bathroom as she took his suitcase downstairs.

David was sitting in the living room. Kathryn put the luggage down beside her own and was about to go clean up Michael's room when David called her back.

"Kathryn, I need to tell you something else."

Kathryn looked at him questioningly.

"I told you I was a wizard and that much is true, but that isn't the whole story. I..." he paused a moment gathering his courage, "My real name...isn't David Barnes."

Kathryn's eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

"I had it legally changed to David Barnes almost seventeen years ago. My real name though..." he paused and then rushed on, "My real name is Harry Potter."

Kathryn blinked and her mouth dropped open, "B...but isn't that who Courtney is doing her project on? The one who gave her that company?" her voice got progressively higher in pitch as she spoke.

David nodded, his face very red. Kathryn closed her eyes and shook her head, visibly upset. "I can't deal with this right now, David, Harry, whatever your name is." Then she stomped out of the living room and gathered Michael from upstairs.

A few minutes later the doorbell rang and David invited the Weasleys in and went to fetch Kathryn. She was helping Michael tie his shoes. He spoke from the doorway, "Tell Courtney good luck from me, please."

Kathryn looked up at him and nodded thinking to herself that he should do so in person. "Fred and Megan are downstairs." Kathryn stood, having just finished tying Michael's shoes. She sighed and

looked at her husband, "David, if you end up deciding to come, don't pretend not to have a way to get there." It was a parting plea.

David kissed his wife and gave Michael a hug and then retreated to his study while they left with the Weasleys.

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The castle was full of bustling students and adults. Parents and other family members were arriving at various times through various means. Most of the muggle parents would be arriving that afternoon on the Hogwarts Express. However, Courtney eagerly awaited her mother's and brother's arrival along with Caleb who was waiting for his parents.

A little before one o'clock the Weasley/Barnes part arrived at the front door. Hermione greeted them as Caleb and Courtney hurried over.

"Kathryn and Michael, you will be rooming in some quarters near the entrance to Gryffindor tower. Fred and Megan, you'll be rooming with the Ministry Personnel."

Fred looked offended, "Hey! I'm off duty."

Hermione grinned evilly, "Too bad. We don't have enough room to put you elsewhere and you technically are Ministry. Anyway, Courtney, would you please show your family up to the room?"

Courtney nodded eagerly and directed Michael and Kathryn up the many flights of stairs.

(A/N: I just realized how much I would hate to go to Hogwarts. I hate stairs. I have to walk up 90 or so steps each morning to go to class. Grrr, not fun. Especially when I am not used to the altitude and really out of shape.)

Hermione watched as Courtney happily led her mother and brother up the stairs. The smile on her face faltered a moment.

"Something wrong, Hermione?" asked the Headmaster at her side, startling her.

She sighed, "I was just thinking how glad I am that my parents were supportive of me coming to Hogwarts. Courtney is such a wonderful girl. It just frustrates me that her father is too short-sighted to see the opportunities that this brings to her."

Albus was quiet for a moment and then he said softly, "Give David the benefit of the doubt, Hermione. I doubt he is acting without reason. Do not be too harsh in your judgment of him." Then the headmaster smiled warmly as he greeted the incoming group of school governors.

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That evening the Great Hall was bursting at the seams. Even with all the careful planning for temporary expansions there still seemed to be no room. However, no one was complaining about crashing elbows; they were all enjoying a scrumptious meal.

As the leftovers disappeared from the dishes (much to the delight of the muggles in attendance) Professor Dumbledore stood and addressed the crowd, "Welcome parents, siblings, alumni, governors, Ministry personnel, and other guests. This is the first time Hogwarts has had the honor of hosting many of you and we hope to meet with your approval. I encourage those of you unfamiliar with our school to ask any questions you might have, or ask one of our House prefects for a tour of an area. I would ask that all those who are new to our facilities to always have someone with you who knows the castle. I now excuse all students above the first year to return to their common rooms."

The older students quickly exited the hall, as asked. "Now, I would ask all of you to please stand up," the assembly did so and Dumbledore clapped his hands making the tables disappear, soft musical strains started to filter through the air, "and," continued Dumbledore, "I invite you to get to know each other. Parents, get to know the teachers; students, meet the governors, but please, enjoy yourselves. Drinks are at the south end of the hall should you find yourselves thirsty."

Everyone immediately started chattering, but Kathryn caught Courtney's arm and pulled her into a corner as Michael found some other children his age, "Courtney," she said softly, "your father told me..." Kathryn paused while Courtney looked at her expectantly. After seeing her mother wasn't going to continue her sentence, she prompted, "Told you what?" A small grain of hope started to grow in Courtney. Had her father perhaps told her more than the fact that he was a wizard?

"He told me that he is Harry Potter." Kathryn said in a rush.

Courtney broke into a wide grin, ecstatic that he had done so, confirming Kathryn's suspicions that she already knew. "Can you...can you tell me more about him?" It hurt Kathryn a lot that she was asking her daughter about her husband's life, but she wanted to know more about the past that David had hidden for so long.

Courtney bit her lip and then nodded, "How about later tonight?"

Kathryn nodded as she saw Megan and Fred approach. Just before they came within hearing range, Courtney whispered, "Don't tell anyone else!" Kathryn glanced at her and then nodded.

The rest of the night went splendidly. However, by the time the opening social ended, both Courtney and Kathryn were exhausted and decided to talk the next morning.

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Early in the morning Michael (along with all the other siblings who were to young to attend the presentations) was dropped off at the "Day Care" center they had come up with for the duration of the visits. Kathryn and Courtney asked to take breakfast in the room where Kathryn was staying.

"What do you want to know about Dad?" Courtney asked after she had eaten a little bit.

Kathryn sighed, "I don't even know where to begin. Your father has always been so...closed about his past. I guess...just start with his parents."

So Courtney told her mother about James Potter and Lily Evans and how Harry became the "Boy-Who-Lived" and was sent to his aunt's house. Kathryn's eyes widened and she started to chuckle. Courtney looked at her strangely.

"Petunia Dursley is his aunt? Courtney—David bought out the company Grunnings a few years ago and gave Vernon Dursley a 'forced retirement.' For some reason he took particular pleasure in that and I could never figure it out because David was never one to participate in the ruination of someone else's business."

Courtney laughed and took a sip of orange juice (obtained by special request from the house-elves).

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Courtney and Kathryn weren't bale to talk about much else before breakfast ended. Presentations began right after breakfast with Gary's project on Ptolemy. The Great Hall had been transformed into an auditorium with a raised platform at the far end. The projects continued throughout the day interspersed with other types of presentations, some catered to the muggle parents, other for the witches and wizards. It was a very packed day and Kathryn and Courtney only had a few minutes to talk before Michael came to the room and regaled them with all the fun he had had that day.

Courtney went to bed that night with butterflies in her stomach as her presentation time approached. She didn't know what was going to happen the next day. How would people react? What was she getting herself into? It was starting to scare her. Jennifer's warning about legal trouble wandered through her mind. Professor Dumbledore's advice not to share the information about Draco Malfoy rang in her mind as well. Then she remembered all the encouragement she had received from Fred, George, Ron, Hermione, Sirius, Dumbledore and finally Harry himself. Her father.

Why was this task hers? If they could all encourage her to do this, why couldn't they do it themselves? All of them had lived with this for sixteen years, why was she the one to finally do something?

Professor Dumbledore's words came to mind. We have not changed much. We are still narrow-minded and selfish, without the slightest idea of what our potential is. We are afraid of change and strike at anything that is different or new. Perhaps, if Harry had stayed we would have been able to change our ways. Seeing our mistake right in front of us, it might have forced us to change. But we chose the easy way, to forget, to pretend it didn't happen. Perhaps you have the courage to show us the error of our ways.

Courtney sighed. It didn't really matter now that no one else had done what was needed. She would do it.

She was trying to change the world.

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Courtney said little the next morning and as the time approached two o'clock she became more nervous. Pretty soon, one of the first year Slytherins was wrapping up her presentation and Hermione was standing before the audience.

"We will have a fifteen minute break and then Courtney Barnes of Gryffindor will present her project on Harry Potter."

Courtney didn't leave her seat during the break. A few people, including the Headmaster came up to her and wished her luck. She smiled gratefully at them and sifted apprehensively through her notes. This was it.

"Courtney," the young girl's head shot up to look at her mother's face.

"Sorry, Mum, I'm just really tense."

Kathryn briefly embraced her daughter and said "You'll do fine."

"Mum, I'm sorry I didn't get to tell you everything about Harry," she didn't dare say "Dad" with so many people around, "You shouldn't have to hear this in a presentation like this."

Kathryn marveled at her daughter's maturity, that she could grasp that pain in Kathryn's heart so easily. That was exactly what was bugging her. It should have been her husband himself telling her. But, it was painfully obvious that he had never had any intention of sharing this past with her, or anyone. So she would have to make do with listening to her husband's life, told by her daughter.

At least she would finally know.

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Hermione caught the Headmaster's eye. The blue eyes twinkled in anticipation at what was about to happen. Hermione gave a small smile and then waved her wand to magnify her voice.

"Please, everyone return to your seats. We will now continue with Courtney Barnes."

There were polite claps in the audience as Courtney stepped up to the platform, clutching her notes. She was terrified. Taking a deep breath she looked at all the people.

Right there in the front row sat the Minister of Magic, his entourage, as well as all the Governors of Hogwarts. Her mother sat with Fred, Megan and their two older children about halfway back. George was farther back. Right behind George she saw a row of people, almost all of whom had red hair, presumably all Weasley relatives. Among them, she recognized Angela's grandparents whom she had met at the opening social. Her teachers stood lining the walls. A few aurors stood at the back.

This was it! She opened her mouth and began.

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A number of people shifted bored in their seats as the girl stepped up looking as though she was about to pass out. Great, another nervous kid, they thought. Even worse, they got to hear again about Harry Potter. The same boring facts that were told every few months in the Daily Prophet. The same story they told their kids whenever they asked about Harry Potter.

Sure enough, after the girl took a deep breath, she started, “I’m sure you have all heard the story of Harry Potter....”

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Courtney relaxed slightly as she recited the story that Hermione had told them the first day of class in her Magical Studies class. Most of the people looked bored. Good she thought, they don’t suspect a thing.

She finished the summary, which took less than two minutes and took a deep breath before plunging in.

“Now, that is the story as it was taught to me in class. I found it interesting because I could see a number of holes in the story. I was puzzled that the library had so little information on someone who obviously played such a pivotal role in the wizarding world. So I began doing some investigating of my own. I couldn’t turn up much information. I almost gave up. Then I thought, Why would Harry Potter leave the wizarding world completely for something like being wrongfully accused? To me it didn’t make sense. Prison might be bad, it might be awful, but it didn’t seem like enough to give someone the desire to completely turn their back on a total way of life.

“I was doing some other homework one day in the library when I discovered one small piece of information that had been concealed from everyone. The fact that dementors used to guard Azkaban. In fact, Aurors only started guarding Azkaban fifteen years ago. Since the fall of Grindewald dementors had guarded the prison.

“For those of you who do not know, dementors are creatures that suck out good emotions. They feed off happiness and light. They leave their victims with only bad memories, dark thoughts and despair.

Most prisoners would go insane after a few months, left only with the most miserable of feelings, wallowing in pain, stripped of any memory that good exists."

Courtney could see some of her fellow students were astonished at this information. Some adults were looking at each other a little bit uneasy. Courtney smiled inwardly and continued, "Harry Potter first encountered a dementor when he was thirteen. That was the year the infamous mass murderer, Sirius Black escaped from prison and dementors were sent to Hogwarts. Harry encountered one on the train. That year, every time Harry encountered a dementor, he would hear his parents' last moments, hear Voldemort murder them," she noticed that some of the people in the hall shivered slightly at the name, old habits die hard she mused and continued, "I wonder why none of this is ever taught at Hogwarts. Why we are taught that Albus Dumbledore defeated Voldemort and Harry Potter helped? Why are we not taught about the farce of a trial that condemned an fifteen-year-old to Azkaban? I concluded that the wizarding world is full of cowards. Too weak to tell the truth, too spineless to face up to its mistakes."

A number of people looked angry at her words. Kathryn was staring wide-eyed at her daughter. Percy Weasley was frowning rather worriedly.

"I finally found out the entire story of Harry Potter. And I will tell you the true story now. After his parents' deaths, Harry was sent to live with his mother's sister and her family. He grew up unloved and neglected. He never had any friends until he turned eleven. His very first friend was Rubeus Hagrid, the same person he was framed for killing."

Courtney told the story of her father's first year. She noticed the expressions on the ministry officials' faces and decided to speed up her story.

"In his second year Harry killed the Basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets saving Ginny Weasley Finch-Fletchley's life in the process. His third year was somewhat less adventurous, yet he managed to stop Sirius Black from receiving the dementor's kiss. Harry 's fourth

year, the year of the Tri-Wizard tournament was his worst up to that point. At the end of the year he and another student, Cedric Diggory, were transported away from the school. Cedric was murdered right in front of Harry's eyes and he was forced to participate in the resurrection of the Dark Lord. He was tied to a headstone in a cemetery as he watched Peter Pettigrew, the same man that betrayed his parents, cut off his own hand and then turn and steal some of his own blood. He saw Voldemort rise from that cauldron and thought for sure that he was going to die that night. He didn't die, thanks to Priori Incantatem, he came back to Hogwarts, carrying the dead body of Cedric Diggory. He was fourteen."

"The summer after his fourth year was filled with horrendous nightmares, as his scar showed him what Voldemort did. He witnessed many murders and other horrible things," Courtney paused as she saw her mother get up and quickly leave the room. Megan Weasley followed her a moment later. She looked at her audience. The students and the other who did not know the truth were listening eagerly. Everyone else, save the teachers that knew about her correspondence, looked surprised, and a little bit scared.

"Worse, the minister of the time, Cornelius Fudge refused to believe Voldemort was back. Harry's fifth year was awful, due to his frequent visions. In October the ministry was forced to acknowledge Voldemort's rebirth. In January Harry was framed for murder by Peter Pettigrew and a number of other Death Eaters who engineered his disappearance into the Forbidden Forest that—"

"Silence!" commanded a loud voice. Courtney looked down to see a very pale and frightened looking Draco Malfoy standing from his seat in the front row, pointing his wand at her. She closed her mouth. She had actually been expecting someone to stop her long before now. Percy Weasley immediately stood and walked up to the platform. He gripped Courtney's shoulder and addressed the audience, "We will have to cut Miss Barnes' presentation short. We invite you all to take a short break." Then he turned towards Courtney, "Miss Barnes, I would like to talk with you."

Meanwhile, Courtney could see Draco Malfoy talking hurriedly to some aurors and to the man she remembered being introduced as

the head of Magical Law Enforcement. Then the group approached the Headmaster and escorted him out of the Great Hall. She allowed Percy Weasley to guide her off the stage.

They walked through the Great Hall and into a room on the side. Courtney noticed a number of people following them. As Percy motioned her to have a seat at the table in the room, Fred and George both entered, as well as two other Ministry officials.

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Kathryn sat against the wall of the bathroom she had run to. She had thrown up a few minutes ago and was now contemplating what Courtney had said about her husband's life.

On the first day a child had presented his project on Voldemort. She had become nauseous as she heard about how ruthless and horrible he had been. Everything that had been said had been vague, but just hearing the sheer number of people he had killed made her stomach turn. Today she finds out that her husband witnessed every single one of them. Those dementor thingys probably made him remember every death as well.

To grow up, unloved, neglected, to be betrayed by everyone you knew, to be tortured by memories, Kathryn shuddered. She only knew a part of her husband's story and already she was starting to understand his actions.

David was the kindest, most compassionate person she had ever met. As a doctor, he had been told never to get emotionally involved with his patients' cases. Most of the time he ignored that warning. He loved his patients. Each one of them became important to him and each one mattered. He would come home and cry when he lost a patient. He had seen so much death and destruction all his life; how did he find the strength to continue to sacrifice his heart? To continue reaching out in love even when he knew the risk of loss was there?

The door opened and Kathryn looked up to see Megan entering the room. "Kathryn, are you okay?"

She nodded and stood slowly. Megan looked at her, brow furrowed, "Why did you run out like that?"

"I just...realized something." Kathryn answered. Megan waited a moment, but then realized she wasn't going to get a better answer than that.

"Do you want to go back? Courtney is probably finished, but Caleb is presenting at 3 o'clock."

Kathryn nodded and followed her friend out of the bathroom. Not knowing the castle very well, Kathryn had gone to the bathroom closest to the room where she and Michael had been staying, so the two had quite a walk back down the stairs.

Halfway down one stairwell Kathryn's foot fell through the trick stair and Megan had to pull her out. As they reached the landing Kathryn slowed to look at a portrait she had not noticed before. It was the only picture she had seen that did not move.

Harry Potter.

Looking at it she realized, finally, where Michael got his looks. The black hair and stunning green eyes of the portrait, with the lightning bolt scar, belonged to her husband. Tears started silently down her cheeks as she gazed at David's true appearance.

"Kathryn?" Megan called up the stairs. Kathryn looked down and saw that Megan was already at the bottom of the stairs.

Turning from the portrait she started down the stairs. On the third step down, the stairwell started to move, switching places like Courtney described they often did. However, the movement caught Kathryn off guard and threw her off balance. She tripped backwards and cracked her skull on the landing she had just left. The stairs continued to move and moved right out from under her, sending her falling to the floor below.

She landed with a sickening thud as Megan screamed.

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Albus Dumbledore was calmly looking at some very irate individuals who were accusing him of blatantly breaking the law and allowing restricted information to be taught. A small smile graced his face as he listened to them quietly.

An abrupt knock on the door interrupted Draco Malfoy's tirade and it opened without an invitation. Bill Weasley entered with a somber expression on his face, a sobbing, hysterical Megan Weasley at his side.

Albus frowned slightly. Bill was supposed to be supervising the older students who had opted for a study period that day.

"Albus, something has...happened," Bill's voice was distraught.

Albus walked past the momentarily mute occupants and took Megan's arm and asked softly, "What happened?"

"K..k..kk," was all Megan could say. Albus looked concernedly at Bill for clarification.

Bill closed his eyes, "Kathryn Barnes is dead."

## Chapter 20:

### Repercussions

Percy Weasley addressed the eleven year old seated across from him calmly. There was no way this child could have known the laws restricting that information and so he was determined to be fair to her. He would not punish her for the deeds of others.

"Miss Barnes, could you please tell me how much you know about Harry Potter?"

Courtney, who was feeling a little rebellious now that she realized she had not had a chance to get to what she really wanted to say, answered curtly, "More than you."

Percy's eyes narrowed slightly but did not change his tone when he said, "What exactly do you know that I don't?"

"Every detail of the night Harry was framed for Hagrid's murder, including how he ended up in the Forbidden Forest."

Percy snorted in a very undignified matter, "No one knows what happened that night. Miss Barnes, allow me to be frank, whoever gave you your information is facing some serious charges. We need you to cooperate. Did the headmaster or any of your teachers tell you about Harry Potter."

Courtney was silent for a moment, hesitant to tell Percy the whole truth now that she knew her father's alter ego was Harry. So instead, she asked a question, "Are people who already know allowed to talk amongst themselves about Harry?"

"Yes."

"I talked to the Headmaster, Sirius, Hermione, Ron, Fred and George after I already knew about Harry."

Percy's eyebrows shot up as he stood and turned to the twin Unspeakables. "You knew she had this information?" He was angry

that three of his brothers and one of his sisters-in-law had evidently been party to this public airing of Ministry secrets. He whirled back around to Courtney and demanded, "Who was your original source?"

Courtney glanced at Fred and George who both nodded for her to tell the truth. She sighed, "I wrote some letters and asked some questions. I got answers."

"From who?" Percy was almost seething now and started pacing the length of the room..

"Harry Potter himself."

Percy stopped short and stared at her. Then in a low voice he said, "You expect me to believe that Harry Potter who has had no contact with the wizarding world, except for cursed Howlers, for sixteen years, suddenly decides to write to an eleven year old student?"

"I wrote to him in September after I discovered how little information there was in the library. He wrote back to me. He told me his entire story. You may have been able to silence other people in regards to the truth, but if Harry Potter decides he wants the truth known you can't do anything about it, for two reasons. First, if I understand it, you are under a Wizard's Oath that neither you nor the Ministry will attempt contact with him and second, whether he knows or not or has used it or not, he holds the title, Merlin's Staff."

Percy stared at her, seeing that he was loosing. He turned to his brothers and said, "How long have you known?"

Fred and George looked at each other and the George answered, "Since Halloween. Harry wrote to us asking that all his ownership earnings and privileges be transferred to Courtney."

Percy sat down, defeated. This had already gone too far to stop it. He had to find a way to control it. His mind started trying to salvage the situation. So far Harry had not declared the laws void and so the teachers could still be prosecuted for allowing the information to be made public. That would also mean prosecuting Ron, Fred and George since they had known as well. This was not going to be fun.

He was about to turn to give some instructions to the other two Ministry personnel when there was a knock at the door.

It opened without an invitation and a very somber, upset Albus Dumbledore walked in. "Excuse me, I need to talk to Miss Barnes on a matter of great urgency."

Courtney sat sobbing on the bed in the infirmary, clinging to Hermione for dear life. Fred was standing near a wall holding his own crying wife. George had been sent to fetch Michael from the daycare room. They were not even sure how to explain it to him. Albus and Sirius were closing the curtain around the bed where the body lay. Courtney had insisted on seeing for herself. They hadn't been able to convince her otherwise.

Albus looked heartbroken as he contemplated the death of the young (by wizard standards) mother and what other repercussions it could have. He turned to Sirius and started to address him, "I nee..." his sentence got cut off sharply as a sudden pain erupted in his chest. He almost choked. He looked around frantically, eyes landing on Fred. "Fred," he managed to gasp out, "P...please go to the Barnes' house...."

Fred, startled to hear the directive to him, looked up just in time to see a very pale Albus Dumbledore slump to the floor.

Sirius jumped to the headmaster and Fred, sitting Megan in a chair, hurriedly joined him. Albus' somewhat glassy eyes saw Fred, "Go!" he whispered barely audibly. Fred hesitated.

"Fred, go! We will take care of Albus. Go get David Barnes." Sirius said, already propping the headmaster against the bed and getting up to find Madam Pomfrey.

As Hermione held onto Courtney (who was completely oblivious to what had just happened) she watched a very panicked Madam Pomfrey along with a worried Sirius get the Headmaster onto a bed. Poppy immediately started trying to find out what had happened.

After a few minutes she ceased and pulled Sirius aside, "I suggest you find Minerva. Get her to handle things with the Ministry. Albus has had a massive heart attack."

"How severe?" Sirius asked in a low voice.

Poppy bit her lip, "I need some specialists immediately or he could die of heart failure."

Fred was so nervous he almost ran before he rang the doorbell of the Barnes' house. It had been years since he'd had to deliver such tidings. During the war years, he had often been called upon to notify families of a death. It had been his responsibility to tell spouses and children of some very close colleagues' deaths. Those had been awful experiences. But this task was different, and in some ways worse.

During war, there was a known risk. Even those who were not actively fighting knew they were at risk. Death Eaters had shown no mercy to non-combatants. But this....

This was completely unexpected and senseless! Combined with what Fred knew of David...he felt dread creeping over him. He had liked Kathryn, though he mostly only knew her through Megan and Amanda. He knew Courtney somewhat better through Caleb and personal interaction. She had met with him and his twin a few times since receiving a share of the company. She was a bright young girl. She had told them about her father's gradual reconciliation with the idea of her being a witch.

What would this do to that? What would David Barnes do now? What would Courtney do? As far as Fred could see, Courtney was entrenched in the new culture she had adopted. She would not leave it. Would this completely rip this family apart?

He hesitantly reached out and hit the doorbell. A few moments later David opened the door. His eyebrows rose slightly as he saw who his guest was. "Mr. Weasley, can I help you?" and he extended his hand.

Fred was inwardly surprised at this response. David was being far more polite than he had been at dinner a few months ago, even more polite than he had been when Fred and Megan had picked Kathryn and Michael up only days ago.

“Might I come in?” Fred said grasping David’s hand.

David simply nodded and stepped away from the door to allow Fred to step in. Fred nervously wiped his hands on his pants and entered the house. They entered the living room and sat down, David waiting for Fred to explain why he was there.

“David...” Fred managed to say and then he took a deep breath.

David looked at him strangely. He could feel his stomach starting to knot; he had never seen Fred look this nervous before, he couldn’t meet his eye. Had something happened to Courtney?

“David...oh Merlin! David, something...happened at Hogwarts.”

David’s heart leapt into his throat as he tensed, waiting for Fred to tell him what had happened.

“Kathryn left Courtney’s presentation, upset and ran to the bathroom. Megan followed. I’m not sure why Kathryn was upset, but she...as she was walking back with Megan....”

Fred broke off.

David’s eyes were wide with fear and he stood in agitation, “What happened?” he demanded.

“She fell when the staircase moved. Kathryn is dead.”

A slight gasp was the only sound that escaped David Barnes’ lips as he collapsed onto the floor, staring uncomprehendingly at Fred. Then he slowly started shaking his head, mumbling quietly. Fred cautiously got closer so that he could hear him.

“No, no...oh God, please no! No!...” his voice was full of anguish.

“David, I’m sorry. I’m so terribly sorry,” Fred said softly, “I don’t know how to comfort you...”

Fred trailed off as David stood and looked straight at him, eyes bright with anger and hate. “Take me to my wife,” He demanded in an icy tone.

Fred nodded hastily and pulled out a portkey. He gripped David’s shoulder and said, “Infirmary,” and the world dissolved around the two men.

They landed moments later in the Hogwarts infirmary, David seemingly, not even phased by the foreign mode of transportation. As soon as the man got his footing, he rushed towards the bed where his daughter still clung to Hermione Granger.

Seeing Courtney’s father, Hermione began extracting herself from the girl’s grip. Courtney, not seeing her father, clung tighter.

“Courtney, your father is here,” she whispered. Courtney sat up straight, looked around and then lunged into his arms. He gripped her in a tight hug as Courtney’s sobs began anew and silent tears trickled down David’s cheeks. He slowly lifted her and held her as he sat down in a chair.

Courtney fell asleep in his arms a little while later and he gently laid her on a bed. Then he turned to Fred and Hermione who were still there. “Where is she?” he asked in a choked voice.

Hermione silently led him to the curtained bed in the corner and opened it to allow him in. Then she walked back to Courtney’s bed to allow him some privacy.

He hadn’t wanted to believe it. He’d wanted it to be some horrible mistake. She couldn’t be dead, not his Kathryn. Not his wife. He reached out his hand to feel for a pulse and then placed his hand over her heart and forced his magic to heal her. Tactile healing was what he was best at. He could use his magic without a wand to heal. It had to work.

But there she lay cold and still. There was no doubt that she was dead. And there was nothing he could do. He sank into the chair next to the bed and gripped her still hand, tears once again starting to fall. He gently stroked her cheek and spoke quietly, "Kathryn, Kathryn, I love you. I'm sorry," his voice broke, "I'm sorry I could never tell you. I love you Kathryn, but I couldn't bring myself to tell you the truth about my past. But I love you so much! You and the children are my entire world. Why did this happen? Why were you taken from me?" His voice was now barely a whisper as sobs threatened to emerge, "I love you. You taught me how to love. You remember what I was like when we first met, I was closed off from the world, cold hearted, distant. You opened my shell, you changed my life, Kathryn! You saved me from that bitterness that was consuming me. I..." he broke off and gripped her hand tighter, "I don't know if I can do that again. You were my anchor. Kathryn please, help me, how do I save myself from the bitterness this time, without you?" An anguished cry ripped from his throat as his sobs finally broke through. He was helpless against the grief and pain that crashed through his mind. He was aware of only her cold hand in his.

Slowly a voice penetrated his mind through the heartbroken sobs that were racking his body. "David, David."

It was a man's voice. David gasped, inhaling deeply and turned to look at Fred. "Courtney is awake, and we have Michael in another room."

David sucked in sharply, Michael!

"Has anyone told Michael?" he asked shakily.

Fred shook his head, "We will tell him if you want us to."

David shook his head abruptly and stood. He paused to kiss Kathryn on the forehead then turned to Fred, regaining a little bit of composure, and said, "Please bring Michael to me."

Michael was a little bit confused and worried. The man with red hair (he couldn't remember his name) had come and gotten him a long

time ago, but he hadn't told him anything. Michael was used to watching grown-ups and these ones kept talking in quiet voices and glancing at him. He was afraid he had done something bad, but he couldn't imagine what. So he simply sat on the couch flipping through a book he had taken from the toys.

"Michael," he looked up startled at the red-haired man. "Come with me, your father wants to see you."

Daddy was here? Why was he here?

Michael walked with the man down the hallway and into a room that reminded Michael of the Children's Hospital where Daddy worked. Daddy and Courtney were sitting on a bed. Courtney had been crying, he could tell that much and Daddy looked sad.

David looked up as the door opened once again. Michael stood there with George Weasley. He quickly kissed Courtney and stood. He walked across the room and picked Michael up, bringing him back to the bed. He sat back down on the bed with his son in his lap.

"Michael," he said quietly, "Mommy got hurt today. She got hurt very badly."

Michael scrunched his eyebrows in confusion, "Can you fix her?"

The trust in Michael's eyes, that his father could 'fix' her, nearly made him loose his nerve.

"No Michael, I can't. Mommy was hurt too much. So..." he struggled to find a way to tell the six year old his mother was dead. "Mommy went to heaven so she wouldn't hurt anymore."

"Will she be coming back?" Michael said tremulously.

"No Michael," David said brokenly, "She won't be. Mommy will never be coming back."

Michael started crying, not fully understanding, but just knowing he missed his mother and would never see her again.

Michael had long ago fallen asleep, but Courtney refused to do the same. She clung to David, occasionally shaking as new tears fell, but staying silent.

The three of them were now in a suite of rooms near the infirmary. Hermione was quietly directing the house-elves to make the beds and set some food for the guests. She saw Courtney stiffen and sit up, looking at her father, "You were right," she said in a pained voice, "you were right. You said this world would hurt me, you said it would. You were right! I don't want it anymore Daddy, please, take me home!" she begged him.

Hermione held her breath. She knew, instinctively, that Courtney denying her magical heritage was not the solution here. She desperately hoped that David could see that as well. But she didn't hold out much hope, given what she knew of David Barnes.

David felt a lump rise in his throat. It was starting now. He knew it would come to this. Courtney was giving him what he had wanted, a chance to remove her from all of this. He had never wanted her there in the first place and they both knew why. He wanted to take her right then and leave the school. None of them would ever come back; they would leave it behind forever.

But...

Something stopped him; he just couldn't say it.

He just held Courtney closer and didn't answer.

The next morning, Percy Weasley, visited the Barnes' and offered his condolences. He assured them that there would be a full investigation and then left, quite hurriedly. David started laughing, almost hysterically. He left the room so as not to disturb his children, went into the hallway, and let his laughs run their course as a few tears ran their course as well. Then he sat down back against the worn stones and closed his eyes. He needed to think and this was the first alone time he had had.

Unfortunately, it was interrupted just moments later. Footsteps echoed in the nearly empty hallway. The slowed and stopped as the individual got nearer.

“Mr. Barnes?” the voice asked tentatively.

David scrunched his face up as he opened his eyes to squint at Sirius Black. The man had a concerned expression as he put out a hand to help David up.

David swiftly stood, ignoring the outstretched hand and entered the room, closing the door firmly behind him.

Hermione stood, stretching. They had decided to continue with the presentations and were trying to fit the students whose projects had been canceled the day before into the remaining time. She needed to be there for them, though she would much rather stay here at Albus' bedside. She gently pushed a lock of the now thin and straggly white hair off his brow. He had awoken once yesterday after the initial heart attack and then once again this morning. However, according to the specialists who had been in the evening, he was very weak. His heart had been badly strained and the cells themselves were sluggish. It wasn't pumping oxygenated blood properly. What was more his lungs seemed to be having problems exchanging oxygen as well. They had told Poppy, who had then told a few staff members Hermione included, that if he didn't start responding to their treatments soon he would probably slip into a coma and pass on in a short time.

It was grim news, and coming on the heels of Kathryn Barnes' death.... Hermione sighed and quietly gathered her things. When she had heard Courtney's declaration the night before, she had been afraid that David Barnes would simply take her and leave. When he hadn't answered, she had been relieved, though not completely. He could still make that decision.

She walked out of the room and into the main wing of the infirmary. Albus had been moved earlier and in a few hours, she suspected the arrangements would be made to take Kathryn's body. She shivered slightly. She did not think particularly highly of David Barnes, but she

did truly feel sorry for his loss and the position he was now in. She didn't want to imagine how she would feel if Ron were to die.

As she walked out of the infirmary, she came face to face with an upset Sirius.

"Are you okay?" she asked concerned.

Sirius sighed and shrugged. "On my way here I found David Barnes in the hallway outside his rooms. He...he doesn't like me—that much is obvious. Has been since I first went to their house in August. But...I'm afraid that he hates me now. I think it might be possible that he blames me for Kathryn's death," this seemed to trouble Sirius greatly.

"Why would he think that?" Hermione asked slowly, trying to think of a reason.

Sirius shrugged and ran his fingers through his hair in frustration, "I don't know. Maybe because I was the one who went to their house and introduced the wizarding world? I mean, I know how when you grieve you make all sorts of connections like that which in reality don't make sense."

Hermione nodded slowly and then spoke to him, "I don't know Sirius. Maybe you should try and talk to him. You could certainly help him deal with this."

Sirius nodded. Arabella had died two years before, the fact that it had been expected after a long illness had not made it any easier. "But... I don't know Hermione. To me it feels more personal. I mean it feels like...like there is more than Kathryn's death behind this. Like..." Sirius struggled to figure out what it had felt like when David had looked at him with hatred, "like I had already done something to him."

Hermione snapped to attention at that and stared at him as she connected the pieces in her head. "Oh my...Merlin's beard!" she said in a shocked whisper, "But it all makes sense!" she said in breathless wonder.

"Hermione?" Sirius asked confused.

"I...I'm sorry Sirius, I...just realized something," with that she ran down the hall.

Hermione ran all the way to the faculty lounge and there she collapsed onto a couch. She was breathing hard and it had nothing to do with her running. Her heart was pounding as the realization sunk in.

David Barnes was Harry Potter. It seemed unbelievable. But it made sense! Why else would David act the way he did? Why else would Harry write to Courtney and give her his WWW share? Why else would David Barnes have such a strong dislike of Sirius? Other little things she had previously not noticed came to her mind. Courtney was much more clumsy than Harry had ever been, but she had some of his mannerisms about her.

She felt her eyes water as she realized the implications of all of this. Poppy's words from the night before came back to her.

They don't know what they can do. No treatments are working to relieve the stress that is still on his heart. They don't even know what caused this attack in the first place. Albus has always been in such good health. And...the nurse had paused briefly I am afraid that he knows why it happened, but he would not say when he was awake. I think he knows what needs to be done to help him, but he won't say. The nurse had allowed tears of frustration to fall. The news had been upsetting to them all.

Albus had to know about David. It was the only explanation! But how long had he known? Albus has always been in such good health. Poppy's words repeated in her mind. But Albus had been sick a month ago. Her knowledge of Oaths was rather limited. She frantically tried to remember everything she knew about them.

Albus' Oath to Harry was that neither he nor the school would contact him. However, that Oath was hinged on knowing contact. Albus had to have figured it out before the school had written letters to the parents inviting them to Hogwarts. That was why he had become ill.

The Oath had obviously exacted a price from Albus for infringing on the Oath. She reviewed in her mind the events surrounding Albus' collapse. He had personally asked someone to contact David or Harry directly. He had almost asked Sirius, who was bound by his own Oath as well as Albus'. He had realized that he couldn't do that and had asked the first non-Hogwarts person he had seen. Fred. Although Fred was bound by the Ministry Oath it was better than Albus asking someone covered under the Hogwarts Oath.

I can't approach Harry. Hermione realized suddenly. She herself was covered under the Oath Albus swore to Harry and with the state he was currently in...she was not about to risk hurting him. But that caused a problem of its own, how could she, the one in charge of presentations, not at least talk to the man?

She was still sitting there a few minutes later when Remus came to fetch her to the resumed presentations.

That morning David was busy making arrangements for the funeral. He had notified Kathryn's family the day before. The funeral would take place on the following day. After he had completed what was required he retired to the rooms where they were staying and spent most of the day in solitude. Courtney kept herself occupied, only interrupting her father a few times. Michael required a little bit more attention but once they had a house-elf there to help David was once again left to himself.

He spent most of the day sitting in the main room staring out the window, trying to figure out what he should do.

He had been pushing all of this back for sixteen years. He had buried it and never thought about it, never dealt with it. Then when Courtney had received her letter he had refused to deal with it. He had ignored her, ignored what was happening in his life. Then she had written to Harry and he had responded.

But he still hadn't dealt with it. He still tried to pretend that he knew nothing about the wizarding world, that he was not and had never been involved in the wizarding world. He had tried his hardest not to think about any of it.

And now it all blows up in his face. And Kathryn was dead. She couldn't help him this time.

He took a deep breath and buried his head in his hands. What was he going to do?

The next morning the Barnes' left the castle along with Fred and Megan Weasley to attend the funeral. There were a large number of people attending—Kathryn's family, many of her co-workers, old friends, and even a few students whom she had taught the year before while a teacher had been on maternity leave.

David couldn't bring himself to speak at the funeral and so he just sat and listened, staring at the casket.

It was over fairly quickly and David and the children stood there as many people came and offered their condolences. Kathryn's parents and siblings then invited the Barnes to have lunch with them. It was a quiet affair in which David explained softly that he didn't know what he was going to do, but that he had taken a month long leave of absence from the hospital.

The Taylors offered to take the children for a little while, but David politely declined. A few hours later they parted. David and the children met back with Megan and Fred who took them back to Hogwarts.

Courtney retreated to her room and went to sleep, as did Michael. David was restlessly trying to figure out how to keep himself occupied when a knock came at the door.

He opened it to reveal Megan Weasley. He invited her in and they sat down.

“Do you know what you are going to do yet?” she asked softly.

David shook his head.

“I know you don’t like the wizarding world, and this happening doesn’t make it any easier. Hermione told me what Courtney said. Have you thought about how you are going to answer?”

David stood and turned to the window without answering. After a few minutes he spoke, without turning, “How did you get involved in this world?”

Megan sat back in her seat, “Both my parents and my two siblings were killed in a Death Eater attack in 1997. Death Eater attacked me but before he could kill me the Ministry showed up. Fred stunned the one who attacked me and got me to safety. I was sixteen. I had no family left. My mother’s parents were killed in a plane crash a long time ago and Dad’s parents were too ill to have a teenager in their home again. Molly and Arthur took me in. I lived with them until I married Fred.”

David was now looking closely at Megan, “How did you embrace the world that destroyed your life?” She could tell he was struggling to keep his voice even.

Megan was silent for a moment. She knew that it was not the right time to lecture him about misplaced blame, the heart of the matter was that he had problems accepting the wizarding world.

She stood up and walked towards him. “I embraced it because I loved Fred. I loved what his family did for me. They helped me when I needed it. I was bitter at first; I blamed the wizarding world as a whole. Then I discovered that I couldn’t let myself be bitter and angry if I wanted peace in my life. I needed peace.”

David looked at her and said softly, “Thank you for telling me.”

Megan nodded and then left.

That evening Courtney approached her father, “Daddy, I want to go home.”

David sighed, he knew he had to answer this time. “Courtney, sit with me.”

She sat down beside him on the couch and leaned her head on his shoulder.

"I know you are hurting and you think the best thing to do is to leave it all behind. That is what I did Courtney, I ran away from it all and buried it. But all of this is a part of who I am," tears started forming in his eyes, "It is a part of who you are as well. Your powers are a part of you. You cannot shut them out; you cannot pretend they aren't there. You have made it all a part of you and you have made yourself a part of this world. You cannot hide from it without hiding from yourself. I've hidden from myself for sixteen years Courtney, and it isn't worth it. I can't hide from myself anymore, I can't hide from the past, and I don't want you to make the same mistake I did."

Courtney started crying and hugged her father, partly in relief and partly in despair as to how to handle all this.

Though David meant what he had said, it was still hard to get his mind and heart in agreement. Before he could do this, he needed to see one person and ask a few questions.

Many Ministry officials had contacted him promising that there would be an investigation, that he had their condolences, that the proper steps would be taken, yada, yada, yada. Minerva McGonagall had come as well saying much the same things.

But David needed to speak with Albus Dumbledore and ask how exactly this had been allowed to happen.

He knew that Dumbledore had had a major heart attack two days ago, the same day Kathryn had died. He walked quickly to the infirmary prepared to battle the nurse for a chance to talk with him.

It took a good thirty minutes to convince Madam Pomfrey to let him see the headmaster. He finally managed it by reminding the nurse that he was a doctor and though heart disease was not his specialty, he knew how to act around an ill patient.

The late evening sun filtered across the room as David walked in. Albus had been waking more often the past day, though his condition was not improving very much. He was awake at the moment and his eyes widened as he saw David.

He weakly moved to sit up, but couldn't quite make it. "Don't strain yourself." David murmured, and sat down. Albus laid back down, exhausted from that little exertion. He closed his eyes briefly trying to get his breath and then opened them to look at David.

"How did it happen?" David asked quietly.

Albus opened his mouth to answer, but a harsh cough disrupted him. It subsided after a few minutes but it had worn Albus out completely. He quickly began to sink into sleep again.

Irrationally, David's anger flared, "No! I need answers here!" he demanded standing.

Albus struggled to open his eyes and creaked out, "Release me,"

"What?"

"Oath...Harry..." and then he fell asleep again.

David stared for a moment in shock and then he quickly left the room.

Author's notes:

Wow, this chapter covers a lot. But, David is now coming around to deal with everything. It will still not be easy. Even though he has decided he is not going to leave it all completely, he has yet to decided what he is going to do.

This chapter took a while to write, but thank you everyone for all your reviews!

## Chapter 21

### The Broken Oath

David didn't get much sleep that night and ended up pacing in front of the fireplace around 1 AM. Albus had known. He had assumed that at this point he would safely be an unknown entity. He had simply gone to Albus in order to get some answers, but had ended up with more questions.

He quietly snuck in to Courtney's room and retrieved the invisibility cloak. Then he moved out of the suite and silently through the hallways to the library.

He had some research to do.

Wan rays of morning light crept across the main room and found David sitting up reading with a scroll full of notes beside him. He had not slept at all that night. He was trying to figure out what Albus had meant about releasing him from the oath. His gut told him that Albus would not ask it without reason and so he had to find the reason—not to mention how to do it if he felt it necessary.

He scratched another note and closed the book he had been reading and picked up the next one. Opening it to the chapter on Oaths he started reading.

There is an ancient saying- a wizard's word is as good as his wand. This is in reference to what is formally called a wizard's promise. When a wizard makes a promise it is traditional for him to swear by his wand. It is a sign of good faith, signifying that he takes the promise seriously. However, it is up to the wizard's own integrity to keep the promise, and, if broken, there are no consequences, other than the danger of the other wizard outraged at the broken promise.

On the other hand, a Wizard's Oath is much more powerful. When a wizard makes an oath he swears by his magic. This makes a Wizard's Oath stronger than a Wizard's Debt (see Chapter 9) and equal in strength to a Wizard's Sacrifice (see chapter 17). They are all inherently strong because the magic of the parties involved are

literally bound together. Magic is an integral part of a wizard's body and to remove the magic from a magical being, and leave the poor soul alive, is impossible (with one exception, see Chapter 30). This is why any type of magical bond cannot be broken without consequence.

What makes an Oath stronger than a Debt is the fact that an Oath must be agreed to by both parties participating. A Debt can be formed without the consent of one party. A Sacrifice, though it can, and often does, occur without the consent of one party, is as strong as an Oath because of the nature of the power transfer that takes place (see Chapter 17).

When an Oath is sworn it magically binds both contractors to the terms of the Oath and both are subject to consequences of breaking the Oath in any manner. You cannot knowingly break the terms of the Oath without suffering serious consequences because your own magic will exact a price.

David skimmed through the next few pages, becoming frustrated because the information did not pertain to the situation at hand. He almost closed the book and reached for another as he saw it went into detail about Fidelity Oaths and their consequences. However, he flipped the page anyway and saw to his relief that it had returned to more useful information.

In rare cases, an Oath can be a binding promise in which one of the two parties swears to do something for the other party and the other party has no obligation to the party swearing the Oath. This is sometimes referred to as a Debt Oath because the sworn party usually makes the Oath in order to fulfill a debt to the other party. However, both parties must still accept the Oath. Even if a debt is owed, the party to whom it is owed must still agree to it. An individual cannot simply decide to swear an Oath without the consent of the party to whom it is sworn.

In these cases, broken Oaths have much harsher consequences, and have been known to result in the death of the bound party. The only way for an individual to survive a serious breach of the Oath is for the Oath to be cancelled and the trespass forgiven. The indebted party,

once sworn to the Oath has no control over when or if the Oath is released. Only the party it is sworn to can make that choice.

David continued reading on the Debt Oath for another hour until Courtney came into the room and Michael got up. Courtney quietly greeted her father and then went to the Great Hall for breakfast to see her friends' parents off. The presentations had ended the day before and today the rest of the parents would be leaving after a breakfast feast. Minerva McGonagall had extended an invitation to the Barnes' to remain at the castle while the investigation surrounding Kathryn's death was in progress. A few others involved in the investigation would be remaining as well, but mostly the castle would be back to normal.

A little while later a house-elf arrived with food for David and, at his request, found someone to watch Michael for a little while. After finishing breakfast, David left the suite and approached the infirmary, only to find it crowded with staff members.

“...and last night he slipped into a coma. The specialists don’t think he’ll live much longer,” the nurse said in a choking voice.

Silence filled the room for a moment and then David heard Bill Weasley’s somber voice say, “I suggest we take shifts to watch over him.” There was a murmur of assent. A few moments later the members of the faculty emerged from the infirmary, all looking depressed. David retreated around the corner, though still listening to them.

Courtney didn’t eat a lot, nor did she say much at breakfast, but no one bothered her much, especially after Professor McGonagall had come in and announced that the Headmaster was in a coma. She left the table before Angela and Caleb (who had been shadowing her ever since she emerged from the suite she was sharing with her family) finished eating and headed out of the Great Hall.

She was crossing the entrance hall and about to go up the stairs when someone called her name. She turned around and found herself face to face with a girl she vaguely recalled seeing playing Beater on the Slytherin quidditch team. She had short light brown hair

and was herself only a little taller than Courtney, though she looked to be about fourth or fifth year.

“I’m Amelia Morgan,” the girl said and stuck out her hand for Courtney to shake. Wondering what she wanted, Courtney shook her hand and looked at her expectantly, only to find, to her surprise, the girl was unaccountably nervous.

“I...I really don’t know if this is a tactful time for this, but I just had to ask you, where did you find out all that stuff about Harry Potter? I’ve been trying for years to fill in the gaps, but the professors always refused to answer my questions or told me the Ministry lies even when I had clear evidence regarding the truth.”

This was not what Courtney had been expecting at all. She had had an inkling that maybe this girl would offer her condolences or something, like the Ravenclaw third year whose father had died four years previously. But this was completely unexpected.

Amelia still looked nervous. Courtney gaped for a moment and then simply said, “Why?”

Amelia looked so uncomfortable that she almost squirmed, as she looked away from Courtney. She opened her mouth to answer, but right then a voice called out, “Courtney!”

Both girls turned around to find David Barnes approaching. David stared at Amelia for a moment as though trying to remember where he had seen her before. Then he shook himself and asked the both of them, “Did they tell you about the headmaster?”

Courtney nodded, “they said he was in a coma.”

David nodded distractedly and said rather abruptly, “They don’t think he’ll live.”

Courtney quickly looked down and blinked back the tears that threatened to fall. Amelia choked back her own dismay. They knew he was in bad shape but to have it stated so bluntly was upsetting. David saw this and immediately felt bad for having said it. He put his

arm around his daughter and said “Sorry, could you come back to the rooms with me?”

Courtney looked at him strangely for a moment, wondering what this was about.

“I...I really should go to class,” she finally said.

Amelia felt distinctly uncomfortable at the moment. She felt she was intruding, but it had been David who interrupted her. David sighed and nodded, acknowledging Courtney’s statement and then asked her to come to him at lunch. Courtney nodded and David left. The younger girl shook her head in distraction and turned back to Amelia, “Why do you want to know about Harry Potter?”

“Um...” Amelia began, wishing now for David Barnes to be back and interrupting, “Well, it’s kind of...personal.”

Courtney’s eyes narrowed, she had become even more protective of ‘Harry’ himself since the ministry had started asking questions. She didn’t mind telling them that he had written to her, but then they would always demand an explanation as to why Harry Potter would be writing to her.

Amelia saw this wasn’t the best way to approach the subject and so she decided to tell Courtney exactly why she was interested in the Boy-who-lived.

David paced his room anxiously. It was almost lunch time and Courtney was supposed to be coming any minute now. The thought that Albus Dumbledore might die weighed heavily on his mind. He knew that he was the only one who could heal him or help him, yet something deep inside him made him hesitate. A small part of him was telling him that he should just let him die. Albus had done enough to him in the past that it would be so easy to just pretend he could do nothing. None of the wizards knew that he could help and so nobody would blame him. However, Courtney did know, and if she was unaware at the moment of how her father could help, the truth would certainly be elucidated at some point in the future.

The door opened and Courtney came in, but she was not alone. The girl who had been with her that morning followed her. David threw a questioning look at Courtney.

“Dad, this is Amelia Morgan. She’s a fifth year Slytherin.” David nodded but was still completely confused as to why Courtney had brought her.

“Mr. Barnes, I’m sorry to interrupt your plans, but Courtney insisted I come. I’m not sure why.”

They both looked at Courtney expectantly. She sighed, “Amelia, tell him the story you told me.”

Amelia’s eyes widened in surprise, “But...” she stammered, “but...why?”

David sat down waiting for whatever was coming to come, he really didn’t feel like listening at the moment, but it seemed Courtney was determined.

Courtney sat down and Amelia hesitated for a moment before following her example.

“Amelia stopped me this morning and asked me how I found out so much about Harry Potter. I asked her why and so she told me her story. I think you should hear it.”

Amelia looked a little startled at the commanding tone in the eleven-year-old’s voice. But David Barnes was now looking at her, waiting.

Amelia sighed and started speaking, “I have two older brothers and neither of them is magical. I never even knew magic existed until I got my Hogwarts letter. My parents, especially my Dad, were furious. Evidently, he knew magic existed and hated it.”

David groaned inwardly. He was afraid now that he knew where this was going. Courtney was more upset than she let on about his previous non-support of her at Hogwarts. However, he continued to listen.

“My parents completely disowned me. They didn’t even give me a choice between coming to Hogwarts and being disowned, or ignoring my magic and remaining a part of their household. I haven’t seen them since then. I haven’t wanted to really. I had my last name changed and am currently a ward of Hogwarts, with the headmaster as my primary guardian. I stayed here at Hogwarts for a month after I got my letter and my parents turned me out. I’ve spent each summer since then with a different staff member. I spent the summer after my first year Sirius and his wife Arabella, second with Bill and Kara, third with Hermione and Ron, and this past summer I lived with Minerva.”

David was growing impatient. He didn’t see how this related to the question of why she was interested in Harry Potter. Amelia seemed to read his mind, or at least his expression, and hurried on.

“The reason I am so interested in Harry Potter is because I know things about him but the teachers won’t tell me more. You see, after I got my Hogwarts letter, my Dad started ranting and raving about ‘freaks’ and he went up to the attic and came down with a box that had some magical items in it and he gave it to me, demanding that I, and the box of ‘freakish’ things get out. From what I can piece together, my Dad was too afraid to burn the magical items so he put them in the attic, but looking at them, I came to the conclusion that Harry Potter grew up in my house.”

David was breathing hard at this point. Now, he understood why Courtney had brought Amelia here. He also remembered where he had seen her before—she resembled her mother a lot and he had seen her when having dinner with Vernon Dursley and his family (including his son’s family) almost ten years ago. (This was, of course, before he bought out the company and ruined Vernon, and by extension Dudley.)

He stood and walked to the window so neither child would see his face. He opened his mouth to confirm that Amelia was, in fact, a Dursley, but an entirely different question came out, “Have you made peace with it?”

Amelia, who was still unsure why it had been so important to Courtney that her father know his story, thought for a moment and then answered, "In a way, I guess you could say I have. They betrayed me. My own parents said they didn't love me anymore and I hated them for it, but, now...I guess I don't hate them anymore. I...don't feel anything for them anymore. I forgave them because it didn't matter anymore, they didn't matter anymore, and I could let go of the anger."

Amelia couldn't tell what this man was thinking because he was still facing away from them. Courtney had a hopeful look on her face, like she wanted to know if her father had made a decision.

Suddenly David Barnes turned around, there was determination in his eyes. He looked at Amelia, "Amelia, I would like to extend the invitation to you to spend next summer with my family, indeed I would like you to spend every summer with us and make it your home."

Courtney's eyes widened as much as Amelia's at this unexpected turn of events.

"B...what? But...the Headmaster...my guardian." Amelia couldn't think straight.

Courtney, understanding slightly why her father might have offered this, said slowly "but that would mean the headmaster would have to relinquish custody and he is in no shape at the moment. If he....Professor McGonagall would probably become headmistress and be Amelia's guardian."

"The headmaster will give me custody." He said shortly and marched out of the room.

Amelia looked at Courtney, "What just happened?"

David hurried down the hall. He didn't know what had come over him to even think of allowing someone to die who he had the power to heal. He was a doctor. Even though others of his profession might find it archaic, he still swore to the Hippocratic Oath. Not, he surmised, as a Wizard's Oath, but as a matter of honor in his profession.

Something in the conversation had triggered this, though he wasn't sure what. Perhaps just another matter to discuss with the old man had kicked his mind into gear.

He swept into the infirmary to find it empty, which was a good thing. He continued through to the private room and walked in unannounced. To his surprise he found Severus Snape beside the bed, taking, he assumed, his turn at the vigil. He stood at the abrupt entrance, alert, but relaxed when he saw who it was.

"Are you lost Mr. Barnes?"

"No. I want to speak to Albus Dumbledore."

Snape raised an eyebrow, had the man come completely unhinged in the last few days? Did he not realize he couldn't talk to Albus? He opened his mouth to gently, well, gently for him, explain that he was in a coma, when David Barnes pulled his wand out.

Completely ignoring Severus now, David pointed it at Albus.

"I Harry Potter release Albus Dumbledore from all terms of the binding wizard's oath which he entered into sixteen years ago, and forgive all trespasses against the oath."

Severus' eyes widened in shock. He gripped the armrest of the chair and slowly sat down, staring at the man before him. A moment later he was even more surprised to feel a surge of power go through the room. The other man in the room continued to ignore him as he then opened the shirt of the Headmaster and placed his hands on the aged skin right where his heart was. He closed his eyes and started muttering under his breath. Severus listened carefully and heard him saying things that seemed to be derived from healing charms, but weren't quite what he knew. Then just as suddenly as he had come, David Barnes left the room, leaving Severus to wonder if he had just imagined everything. However, as testimony to the strange events that had just happened, Albus Dumbledore slowly opened his eyes.

Hermione hurried from lunch to the infirmary to relieve Severus from his watch so that he could teach his class. She entered the room and

stopped dead in her tracks at the sight that greeted her. Three specialists from St. Mungo's and Madam Pomfrey surrounded the bed and Severus stood to the side looking completely stunned.

Hermione feared the worst as she slowly approached and her mind registered the words being spoken.

“...unexpected. I've never seen anything like it.” Said a woman she recognized as one of the top cardiologists at St. Mungo's.

“Mr. Snape, it would help a great deal if you would tell us what happened, one man said impatiently.”

Snape still looked too stunned to speak, and just shook his head silently. Suddenly a most welcome voice was heard over all the talking, “What matters most is not how it was done, but that it was done, my good friends. Might I simply find out how my school is doing and figure this out later?”

Hermione pushed one of the doctors out of the way and tackled Albus Dumbledore with a hug and started sobbing with relief.

Ten minutes later the specialists had gotten no further and finally they left as did Madam Pomfrey. The nurse, other than her personal worry for Albus, could find no reason to keep him there. Severus and Hermione remained with the Headmaster. Albus turned to Severus, “Could you please tell me what happened?”

Courtney sat in Herbology distracted by her father's actions. He had not returned before lunch's end and so she and Amelia had simply gone to class. Courtney told Amelia to join them for dinner and that hopefully her father would explain then why he had made such a seemingly outrageous offer.

Professor Longbottom noticed Courtney Barnes' inattentiveness, but let it slip, considering this was the first time she had attended class since her mother's death.

Severus blinked, seemingly surprised at the request, but Hermione's mind was whirling, "He...he..must have released the oath!" she blurted.

Both men looked at her in surprise and she blushed.

Albus chuckled, "When did you discover the truth?" he asked.

"Just a few days ago. How and when did you figure it out?"

"When Severus revealed to me that Courtney Barnes is a Parselmouth."

Hermione's eyebrows shot up. That was not something she had known.

Severus managed to tell them both what had happened and then retreated to his dungeons to brood.

David wandered the castle for hours, thinking. He had released Albus, and effectively the rest of the Hogwarts staff minus Sirius, and revealed himself to Snape in the process. Probably not the smartest thing he had done all day, but....

He heard footsteps behind him and turned around to see a very startled Sirius Black. "Mr. Barnes, can I help you? Are you lost?"

David shook his head. Sirius looked at him for a moment and then said carefully, "Would you join me for a drink, I have no class at the moment and I would like to talk to you."

David hesitated, but nodded and followed him. Sirius led him to his private quarters not very far away. He poured him some pumpkin juice (Sirius had been surprised at the selection, he had thought the man might want something a little bit stronger.)

After an uncomfortable silence, Sirius finally started by saying, "How are you handling things," hoping against hope that he would not offend the man.

David shrugged. "It hurts. A lot." Tears started flowing silently down David's face, crying once again for his wife.

Sirius nodded and hesitantly said, "It does hurt. When Arabella died two years ago, I thought I could never function again. Remus and my friends helped me through that time."

David looked up in surprise, he had not even realized Sirius had been married, much less that she had died. Yet another similarity with this man.

"It doesn't stop David. You move on with life and accept it, but you never want to let go completely. You always remember, and though the pain fades, it is always there."

David nodded absently and said softly, "Death seems to haunt me, always taunting me, but never taking me."

Sirius was startled by this morbid statement, but he heard the anguish in David's voice. He must have lost many people in his life. Like himself. Sirius remembered feeling the same way many times, when he remembered Lily's and James' deaths, when he saw hundreds of people he knew dying on the battlefield, when Arabella had slipped away, and now they were loosing Albus as well.

David stood up, his demeanor suddenly becoming cold, as though he had just realized who he was talking to, nodded his thanks and left without another word, leaving Sirius Black once again puzzling over the mystery known as David Barnes.

Courtney entered her father's rooms right after classes ended for the day. "Dad, I invited Amelia over for dinner," she said hesitantly.

"Good, I'm going to tell her."

"Tell her?" Courtney didn't dare hope he meant what she thought he did.

"About me."

Courtney ran over to him and hugged him.

There was a knock at the door and Courtney hurried to open it. She gasped when she saw that it was not Amelia, but instead the Headmaster looking the epitome of health.

“Ah, Courtney, may I come in?” she just nodded in astonishment, unable to reconcile this with the comatose Headmaster she had been told of this morning.

“Mr. Barnes, I understand you wanted to talk to me?”

A/N: Ok, rather short chapter, especially after two months. I am really sorry, but this is where the chapter wanted to be divided. I will revise this chapter a little tomorrow and add more author notes, but I promised this before 2004, and I’m getting it in two hours under the mark (US Mountain time). I know I need to put more into Amelia and show more of her character in this chapter, but she is the character that just jumped in without permission but she, as you can see, is a catalyst in this chapter. I also know I need to show more of their grief that is still prevalent. But they have other things that need to be taken care of at the moment so they are...distracted.

Please review!

Happy New Year everyone!

## Chapter 22: Where do I belong?

David's chest tightened and he almost started hyperventilating at the sight of the Headmaster in the door. He calmed himself by breathing in and out slowly. Then he addressed Courtney, "We'll have to postpone our dinner plans, I need to speak with your headmaster," he said softly, not looking at the older man.

Courtney's eyes were wide still from the shock of seeing the headmaster and she let out a small squeak in response to her father. Then she scurried to find Amelia and tell her they would not be having dinner that night.

Albus waited uncertainly in the doorway. It had been a big decision to come here without an invitation, and he did not want to push too hard. He had no right to expect anything from this man. David walked over to the window, his back turned.

"Please, close the door and sit down." David fought hard to keep his voice even. He didn't even know what he was feeling at the moment. His emotions were all in chaos. He heard the door close softly and a slight swish of robes indicating the man had sat down.

Silence filled the room.

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"Courtney, there you are!" Amelia said happily as she turned the corner towards Mr. Barnes' rooms.

Courtney stopped short in front of her looking very pale.

"Are you okay?" Amelia said in confusion.

"Yeah...fine. Um, we'll have to have dinner with my Dad some other time though. He is talking to the headmaster."

Amelia's eyebrows shot up, "The headmaster?" she repeated.

Courtney sighed and leaned against the wall, "He just walked in a few minutes ago. He looked perfectly healthy! Dad didn't seem surprised that he was just fine." Courtney didn't know what to make of that.

Amelia was silent and then she said, "Does your dad have a split personality or something? First I hear that he is hostile to the wizarding world in general and then he offers to adopt me? I can't figure him out."

Courtney snorted at the idea of her dad having a split personality-it was so close to the truth. "Believe me, I was confused for months, finally I talked to him over Christmas and he told me some things that helped me understand him. Maybe we can have breakfast with him tomorrow."

Amelia looked at Courtney and then said in a soft voice, "You don't understand, do you? I can't just trust that I will understand later. You have known your father all your life Courtney and so you can wait for answers. I can't. I've had too many things taken away from me to trust blindly. I don't need someone else in my life who has problems with me being a witch. What am I supposed to think when someone who I have never met suddenly offers me a home? I am not a Slytherin for nothing, I immediately suspect his motives! What is your father playing at?" her voice had become progressively louder in frustration.

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David was the one who finally broke the silence. He sat down on a chair opposite Albus, but instead of looking at him, he placed his head in his hands, squeezing his eyes shut to prevent the tears that threatened. Just why they were threatening, he wasn't sure.

"How did it happen?"

Albus wanted to do more than just answer questions. He wanted to embrace this man and take away all the pain, all the pain that he had helped to create. But David was not giving him that option and so all he could do was answer his questions.

"Kathryn left partway through Courtney's presentation. Megan Weasley followed her. She told me she found Kathryn in a bathroom. She seemed upset but wouldn't tell Megan why. Megan convinced Kathryn to return the presentations. Kathryn had gone to the bathroom on one of the upper floors, because it was the only one she knew how to find. As they were walking down the stairs a painting distracted Kathryn. Megan got to the bottom and realized Kathryn was not with her. Kathryn started down the stairs, but then the staircase moved. Kathryn lost her balance, hit her head on the landing and fell to the floor below as the stairs continued moving."

Tears were silently streaming down David's face now. There was no room for anger at the moment; all he felt was pain and anguish at the loss.

"This school," David said in a broken voice, "has been open for more than a thousand years. The stairs have always moved; has this kind of thing ever happened before?"

"No."

Anger leapt to life in David, "Then how did it happen! Why did my wife die, when this has never happened before?"

Albus closed his eyes gathering his courage to answer.

"The founders never meant for a muggle to enter Hogwarts. The wards were never configured for the possibility of muggle guests. This is the first time in Hogwarts history that more than a few muggles have been in the castle at once+. It was decided by the board and the ministry that it would be too time consuming and power consuming to completely reconstruct the wards to accommodate muggles as they assumed this would be a one time event. So we simply asked that those unfamiliar with the castle to always have someone familiar with it accompany them. It was more polite than saying bluntly, muggles stay with someone who has magic. In the middle of the presentation however, everybody was too involved in Courtney's revelations to realize that two muggles had just left alone.

“Hogwarts itself recognizes magical beings. The stairs never move when students are on them because Hogwarts ‘knows’ that they are there\*. Even squibs have enough magic to be recognized. The stairs would not have known a muggle was on them. So they moved to the appropriate place at the appropriate time. And it was the worst possible moment for Kathryn to be there.”

David looked at Albus disbelievingly, “So it was an accident. A freak accident.”

Albus could only nod in shame.

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Courtney looked at Amelia, somewhat at a loss of what to do. It was not her place to tell her father’s secret. She finally shrugged, “I...I don’t know what to tell you.” She sighed to herself, “Come on, lets get some dinner and then we’ll talk.” Amelia nodded in agreement, and the two headed to the kitchens. Neither felt like having to deal with the crowds of the Great Hall at the moment, much less with the stares of people wondering why a Gryffindor and a Slytherin of different years were eating together.

After eating quickly they walked back towards the Barnes’ suite. Courtney stopped and turned to Amelia when they were a few halls away, “If Dad doesn’t have time to explain then I’ll tell you, but it is really his story to tell. Not mine.”

Amelia frowned and opened her mouth to say something else when three figures entered the corridor, Percy Weasley, Draco Malfoy and Susan Bones, who, Courtney remembered, had been introduced as the head of Magical Law Enforcement. Her stomach twisted as she saw them, dreading a confrontation.

Sure enough, the Minister of Magic spotted her and came to a halt, “Miss Barnes, how are you doing this evening?”

Courtney nodded stiffly without voicing an answer. Percy completely ignored Amelia’s presence and addressed Courtney once again, “We

are going to be asking a few more questions of you later on, but right now we have some other business to attend to."

Then the three swept off leaving both girls flabbergasted. "What just happened?" Courtney said confused. Amelia didn't answer, but instead started following the trio. After a moment Courtney followed as well.

Courtney's stomach began twisting around itself as she realized they were heading to her father's rooms. Vaguely she wondered what reaction he would have when he saw Draco Malfoy, but then the implications of the three of them together crowded out those thoughts.

"They're going to arrest the Headmaster," she said in disbelief, not even registering Amelia's gasp in response. They turned the corner and watched the Minister, and his entourage, approach the rooms.

However, the door opened while they were still twenty feet from it and the Headmaster exited-evidently finished with his conversation. He did not seem at all surprised to see Malfoy, the Minister and Ms. Bones instead he simply nodded a greeting.

All three seemed a bit taken aback at his attitude—not to mention his good health—and were silent for a moment. Malfoy recovered himself first and spoke in a drawling voice, "Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, we are here to escort you to the Ministry on charges of sharing Ministry secrets and allowing classified information to be disseminated to the public. Your trial, which will be combined with a number of others accused of the same, will be held tomorrow morning."

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow at Draco, "I am sorry, Mister Malfoy, but you do not have the authority to make arrests, even if you are on the Ministry Intelligence Regulation Council."

Draco's face flushed and he clinched his jaw momentarily; for a moment nothing happened. Then he visibly relaxed himself and turned to Susan, "If you would be so kind, as to please perform your duty." Then he turned on his heel and stalked away, passing Amelia and Courtney without giving them a second glance.

The two girls turned their attention back to the situation with the Headmaster and watched as Percy Weasley handed him a portkey that whisked him away—presumably to the Ministry.

The Minister and Ms. Bones turned and headed back towards where Amelia and Courtney were observing from. Not wanting to have to talk to them at the moment, Courtney ducked back around the corner and into a room. Amelia followed and they both waited for the two to pass.

Once the hall was clear they quickly made their way to Mr. Barnes' rooms in hopes of getting some answers.

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David heard Albus close the door behind him as he left. Albus had revealed something else that he needed to think about. After he said that the stairs had moved at “the appropriate time” he had admitted, not five minutes later that that was not exactly accurate.

The story that Albus had told him had left him stunned and confused, wondering why fate always seemed to turn his life upside down. He heard some voices outside his door but ignored them and sat down instead, staring into the fire.

Albus had told him that he didn’t want to lie anymore and that included telling him the entire truth—including some facts surrounding Kathryn’s death that no one but Albus himself knew. David managed to push aside his animosity for Albus for a few minutes and actually appreciated—for a second the man’s honesty. No one would have ever found out what Albus had told him—if Albus had not told him he would never have suspected. It was a sign to him that Albus at least had changed from the man who had been his own headmaster.

A knock on the door interrupted his thoughts and he called for whoever it was to come in. Tentatively Courtney and Amelia entered. David sighed and motioned for them to sit down.

He looked at Amelia and saw a number of questions on her face—questions that he knew needed to be answered.

“Go ahead,” he said simply, wanting her to take the lead in the conversation. Amelia glanced quickly at Courtney and then looked at David once more asking, “Why did you offer to adopt me?”

Of course, David thought, that would be her first question.

“I never had a family growing up—my guardians hated me and degraded me at every chance. Given the chance they would have done to me exactly what they did to you. I...am sorry I could not offer it to you before, but I offered to adopt you because I...I want to hold on to what little family I have.”

Amelia looked at him in consternation, “And just how are we related?”

“You and I are first cousins once removed. I was born Harry Potter—and nephew to your grandmother Petunia.”

Courtney felt a swell of pride. It was rather odd, considering that she was the child and he the adult but she suddenly had the feeling that in saying what he had just said he had overcome another obstacle in his way.

Amelia’s eyes widened considerably and she gasped as she realized the implications of Harry Potter and David Barnes being the same man. Then, displaying maturity that David admired, she got herself under control and asked a second question—one that was in many ways far more pertinent, “But that does still not help resolve my main concern, as I told Courtney, I do not need any more people—especially relatives—in my life who have a problem with magic. What are your intentions towards the wizarding world?”

David opened his mouth and then closed it. He looked at Amelia for a long time and then looked to Courtney. He could see his daughter wanted an answer to that question as much as Amelia did. “I still have not figured that out yet,” he answered honestly, “I still hate them for what they did to me, but...as I said Courtney and Michael are more important to me. Even if I can never again accept the wizarding

world as a part of my life I will not interfere with their decisions with regards to magic. I have no right to make that choice for either of them or you. And no matter what decision any of you make about this world I will support you in that decision."

Amelia nodded satisfied. The answer—while not completely what she wanted—was honest and more than she had ever thought she could expect from family. And despite what she said or otherwise indicated, she wanted family desperately. A surrogate family would have been fine, but this was even more promising—a blood relation who was not ashamed of her.

Courtney, on the other hand had started crying, because for the first time she realized what huge changes her father had made in his life to come to this point. David seemed to understand her tears and gathered her into a hug. He released her after a moment, keeping one arm wrapped around her shoulder, and looked at Amelia in a silent invitation for her to join them. Hesitantly Amelia did so and the three of them embraced. Amelia struggled to keep her own tears in then as she realized that this was the first physical affection she had received in five years.

+One of my reviewers told me that in England there is not a real graduation ceremony where parents and family come etc, like we have in the US. This is why Muggle parents don't go to any graduation ceremony. If my information is wrong, sorry.

\*In the books it only says that the stairs lead to different places on different days. I take artistic license to say they physically switch from one location to another—as the movies do. However, I am not following the movies in that they move while people are on them (well normally they don't).

A/N Ok, sorry once again about the lateness and the shortness of this chapter. It is only four pages long but this is where the chapter wanted to break and the next chapter is already started. Title of that one? "Trial and Error." Look for that one soon! Yippee! I got over my writers block! Thank you to everyone on the group who commented on the parts I posted—it really helped me to identify the problem and correct it.

Hm, about the evil little mystery twist I put in with Albus telling David something—you will eventually learn what it is. But it has to do with a question someone asked on the group about Megan and Fred Weasley's two oldest children and a comment Professor Snape made as well. This is not a new thing either—I thought about it a long time ago I just never expected it to actually be included in the story—it was supposed to be a side story I would write later.

Anyway! Hope you enjoyed the chapter!

Oh, one more thing! April 1st was this story's first birthday!

## Chapter 23

### Trial and Error

David opened his eyes as sunlight from the window streamed into the room. It was early still and he had gone to bed late, but he had never needed long hours of sleep to feel rested. Without moving he savored the warmth under the covers and thought about what he needed to do that day. He needed to talk to Amelia in more detail about adoption arrangements. He needed to find out how these laws worked in the wizarding world. He supposed he should also see a lawyer and get his will changed. He winced as he realized that he would have to change it anyway because everything changed with Kathryn gone. They had named each other primary beneficiaries and then the kids.

Why did I decide to have separate bank accounts? He wondered to himself. Now he had to go through the added burden of legally claiming all of Kathryn's assets. It wasn't something he wanted to think about, much less something that he looked forward to doing. Sighing he recalled that Kathryn had never wanted it that way and that he was the one who had insisted on giving her "independence" and not encroaching on her earnings. Now it seemed rather stupid.

A movement to his right startled him out of his thoughts until he remembered the night before. After Amelia had left and Michael had come back to the rooms, both of his children had joined him on his bed. Michael had fallen asleep in his lap quickly, but he and Courtney had talked about a lot of things. He had explained to her what Albus had told him had happened and they had talked about how they were going to work things out without Kathryn. It had been an emotionally wrenching talk for both of them, but it had also been a catharsis. Eventually Courtney had fallen asleep on his bed as well.

Discussing Kathryn's death had brought back all the emotions of hurt and loneliness and he had not wanted to be alone that night. So he had simply allowed both of his children to stay in the bed with him. He looked at Michael on his right and Courtney on his left. They were so peaceful in their sleep, seeming so innocent and carefree. Looking at them you could not tell the turmoil their lives were currently in.

His conversation with Courtney told him how confused she still was about her place in this world. How she wondered if she had done the right thing to expose the truth, to get her teachers in trouble. David could not offer very good advice on those matters, but, he discovered, it seemed enough for her that he listened. He supposed it rather stupid that he could not offer any insight into that particular problem considering it was the truth about him that she had exposed. For a long time after the two of them had fallen asleep he sat in thought.

Mostly he thought about all that had happened in the last week. He could not contain the tears of grief that once again wet his cheeks, but, to his surprise, he no longer felt the hopelessness that had enveloped him before. He had determined that being with the children was the best thing for him, even if it did mean staying at Hogwarts for the time being.

He had thought back to more than fifteen years ago and all the grief and pain he had experienced non-stop for the ten years prior to that. Opening up to Kathryn had been one of the hardest things he had ever done. Learning to feel emotions besides, anger hate and fear had been a difficult task. But it had been worth it to feel again. He had actually been happy. For the first time that he could recall in his life he had been happy, satisfied with his place in the world.

Looking back now he realized that his “happiness” had not lasted long. An undercurrent of anxiety had been present from the time Courtney first showed magic. He had buried it and ignored it of course, and he still had plenty to be happy about, especially considering how his life had been before that time.

Simply put he had not had any plans to rethink things (‘things’ meaning his relationship with the wizarding world) because it would have disrupted what happiness and security he had found in his life—things he had never had before and was not willing to risk losing on those who did not deserve anything from him.

He sighed as he found himself following the same lines of thought as the previous night. He had not come up with conclusions about what he should do, but he had started asking himself questions.

Preeminent among them was can I be happy as a part of the wizarding world once more?

Immediately he had realized that no, he could not. To rejoin the wizarding world was simply something he could not contemplate for any length of time. So what could he do? His emotions warred within him, the disgust he still felt for the wizarding world, coupled with the pain of Kathryn's death, contrasting his desire to help and support his children. His family.

Pursing his lips he decided that he was not going to solve it now and he slowly extracted himself from the two warm bodies on either side of him to get ready for the day.

David had showered, gotten dressed, eaten breakfast and was sitting in the main room of the suite by the time Courtney and Michael woke up. They greeted him energetically and then Courtney left to go eat breakfast in the Great Hall, while David told the breakfasting Michael what he would be spending the day with his grandparents while he took care of some things.

When his son was dressed and ready for the day, the two walked towards the main entrance of the school to walk to Hogsmeade. Michael eagerly greeted the portraits and laughed as a suit of armor saluted him.

However, as they approached the entrance hall, the doors of the Great Hall burst opened and out ran a frantic looking Amelia. She almost ran into the two, but managed to stop herself before bowling Michael over. David reached out a hand to steady her as she caught her breath.

“David! The Ministry just came in and took Courtney to be a witness at the trial today! They took her by Portkey.”

David's eyes widened in surprise before anger set in. How dare they!

“Who?” he managed to bark out.

“The Ministry’s Prosecuting Attorney, the one in charge of prosecuting the Headmaster and everyone else.”

“Everyone else? What do you mean by that? Since when is there a trial for the Headmaster anyway?”

Amelia realized that she and Courtney had forgotten to tell David about the scene they had witnessed in the hallway. She quickly filled him in about the Headmaster’s arrest and then told him that she had found out at breakfast that Hermione and Sirius had both been arrested as well. David assumed from that information that Ron, Fred and George had all been arrested and were to be tried at the same time.

And the ministry had the audacity to have an eleven year old be their star witness.

David didn’t take long to determine a course of action. “Amelia, will you come to the Ministry with me?” he asked in a low voice. The teenager gave a short nod.

David turned around and picked up Michael, who had been playing with a cat in the hallway. “We’ll have to drop Michael by his grandparent’s house before we go to the Ministry. It will take some time to get to the Taylors’ and I’m not sure if I quite remember where the Ministry is located, do you know?”

“Yes, I’ve had to make an appearance with the Headmaster every year to make sure the paper work for my summer home was straight.”

“Well then, lets get down to Hogsmeade and buy a portkey. I’m not about to risk apparating with the two of you when I haven’t apparated in more than a decade and I was never good at making my own portkeys.”

Amelia nodded and the three left the castle. Setting a brisk pace down the path to the village, David pondered desperately in his mind what in the world he was going to do once he got to the Ministry.

Procuring a portkey in Hogsmeade was an easy enough task, although it did take David a few minutes to decide which portkey would be closest to the Taylors'. He also purchased a second portkey for him and Amelia to use to get close enough to the Ministry (Portkeys directly into the Ministry were strictly prohibited for purchasing and were only available for use by Ministry personnel).

The three exited the shop and David told Michael to put his hand on the cup, as Amelia did so automatically. David then braced himself for the unpleasant sensation of portkeying and said, "Luminosity."

All three were pulled in a whirl of color through space to land very ungracefully at an OWL post office that was located just a few miles away from the Taylors' house. David rolled his eyes and winced as he felt a weight pressing on him, while Amelia groaned and rubbed her elbow which had smacked hard against a wall. Michael, however, jumped right up from where he had landed—on David—and said in an excited voice, "Can we do that again?"

David gaped at him for a second as Amelia smothered a laugh. Standing up David simply answered his son with a, "Not now." Dropping the cup in a bin labeled "Used Portkeys" the three exited.

David hailed a taxi and directed it to the Taylors' house. During the ride he realized that there were a few things that he needed to explain to the Taylors for them to understand that his life, and therefore their lives and their grandchildren's lives were going through some major changes. David shook his head to himself in exasperation, of course all our lives are going through major changes, Kathryn's dead! His breath caught in his throat and for a moment he felt like he was going to break down in tears. Instead, he forced his mind to think about the changes The Taylors still did not know about the wizarding world, as David had absolutely rejected the idea of Kathryn telling them.

The taxi pulled up to the house and David paid the fare herding Amelia and Michael to the door. Amelia seemed to want to hang back, probably feeling out of place here, which, David reflected, was a perfectly natural reaction.

The door opened to reveal Kathryn's mother before they even reached it, and Michael ran the last few meters to be enveloped in his grandmother's arms. David joined and gave her a peck on the cheek.

"Rachel, I hope you don't mind me stopping by like this, I have some things I need to take care of, and I was wondering if you would watch Michael for the day."

"Of course David, don't worry." She said as she ushered them all into the front hall. She glanced a moment, confused at Amelia's presence.

"Sorry, Amelia, this is Rachel, my mother-in-law; Rachel, this is Amelia, a cousin of mine. Some of what I am doing today involves her and her family."

Rachel's eyes widened at the knowledge that David was actually on communicating terms with a relative—Kathryn had told her as much as she knew of David's estrangement from his aunt and cousin-his only surviving relatives.

However, that was not what was important now, "Nice to meet you Amelia, please have a seat. David, I'd like to speak with you in the kitchen."

David nodded and followed the older woman into the kitchen. "How are you doing David?" she asked in a soft voice motioning for him to sit down. He sat and ran his fingers through his hair. "In all honesty, I don't even know. I have so many things going on, so many other thoughts crowding in. There are responsibilities I still have to see to and new things appear daily." He closed his eyes for a moment and then continued, gazing at her while his eyes watered, "I miss her, I miss her so much. She is so much of who I am, Rachel. She was...she was...." He trailed off and wiped his face.

Rachel smiled weakly at David and took his hand in hers. David took a deep breath to reign in his emotions and then asked Rachel the same question, "How are you doing?"

"Managing. Keeping myself busy. Jackson has mowed the lawn four times in as many days. They always say that no parent should have

to bury a child. I've learned that it is true, it hurts so much. Jackson and I are going to change our wills so that Courtney and Michael receive Kathryn's inheritance. It ... is just so hard to think about though."

David nodded in understanding, remembering his own thoughts from that morning. "Would you mind if I came over for dinner tonight and discussed a few things with you?"

Rachel shook her head and stood, asking, "Would you like a drink?"

"No thanks, Amelia and I need to be places. It might be a late dinner tonight, because I'm not sure how long everything will take today."

Rachel nodded in understanding. David returned to the living to hug his son goodbye and collect Amelia to go to the Ministry.

They walked a few blocks away from the Taylors' house in silence. Behind a small stand of trees in a park Harry pulled out the second portkey. Both held it and David said in a nervous voice, "Minutia."

As he felt the familiar sickening pull at his naval he once again wondered what in the world he was going to do at the Ministry.

Amelia and David landed—standing this time—in an alley adjacent to the Ministry entrance phone booth. As they both stepped into the booth David glanced at the phone in consternation, "I don't recall if I ever knew what the number was for this entrance. Come to think of it, I don't think I ever used this entrance."

Amelia picked up the phone and dialed 6-2-4-4-2, which David realized belatedly, spelled out M-A-G-I-C.

When the voice asked their names and business David replied with "David Barnes and Amelia Morgan, multiple legal obligations." Their name tags popped out; they put them on and after being reminded to check their wands they descended to the Ministry Atrium.

At the wand station, David hesitated, wondering what he should do about his wand—wondering about whether or not he should reveal it.

He finally decided that since he did not know whether or not there was any way to detect an unchecked wand that he had better do it anyway so as not to cause any delays.

Amelia's wand was checked by a disinterested security witch and then David presented his to be checked, hoping against hope that they could not check who the wand belonged to. The witch put the wand on the scale and read off the parchment it spit forth, "Eleven inches, phoenix-feather core, been in use thirty years?" David nodded shortly glancing around nervously and retrieving his wand from the witch's outstretched hand.

David then walked quickly to a desk labeled "Information" and asked the young wizard where he might find the Minister of Magic.

"The Minister is currently in courtroom ten as part of a trial being held. It is restricted entry, so you won't be able to speak with him. I suggest you make an appointment with his secretary on Level One." The man said all this without looking up from his newspaper, where he was busily reading an article, David noticed, about the arrest of Albus Dumbledore. Turning and walking a small distance away David discreetly asked a passerby how to get to Courtroom Ten. He then gestured for Amelia to follow him as he approached the lifts. The ride down was silent with tension. The doors of the lift opened loudly in the quiet hallway.

Courtney sighed in frustration once again as the Minister's aide droned on at her, talking about what would be expected of her: how she should act, what she should say, and what was going to happen when she was taken into the courtroom. At the moment she was sitting in a small room off the side of courtroom ten, evidently waiting to be brought in for testimony. Courtney lowered her head into her hands and finally the woman groaned. Courtney looked up at the woman.

"Have you been listening to anything I have been saying?" she said crossly.

Courtney looked guiltily at her. The woman stood up and left the room coming back a moment later with the Minister himself. She murmured

a few words beyond Courtney's range of hearing. Percy Weasley nodded and glanced at Courtney before turning back to the lawyer and saying a few things. The lawyer left the room, leaving Percy alone with Courtney.

Percy regarded Courtney for a few moments before speaking. When he did start talking it was in even measured tones, "Miss Barnes, I am told you are reluctant to cooperate with our investigation. It really is in your best interest to help us. We are only trying to uphold the laws."

Courtney gulped nervously. She couldn't really see how it would be in her interest at all to help them, but she knew she wouldn't be able to convince them of that—but she knew who could.

"Where is my father?" she asked.

"Your father is still at Hogwarts. And what does he have to do with anything? You are simply needed to testify and then you will be back with your father at Hogwarts before he even knows you are gone."

"You didn't even tell him you were taking me from the castle? I may not know much about law, but have seen enough law shows to know that you can't just have a minor testify without notifying a guardian!"

Percy got a patronizing look on his face, "Perhaps in the muggle world, but this is a different world, Miss Barnes. He cannot understand the intricacies of the wizarding world and therefore we are not required to inform him. Your Headmaster is *in loco parentis* while you are in the wizarding world and he already knows you are here."

Courtney's jaw was actually hanging open. She couldn't believe he had actually said that. The muggle prejudice had never been so apparent to her, and to hear it from the highest authority of the wizarding world frankly scared her.

Then a smile crept across her face as she realized Percy Weasley is not the highest authority in the wizarding world. She shook her head. She knew her father would be very angry when he found out that she had been taken to the trial without his permission. The trial itself didn't

really matter at all because her father could do anything he wanted. The minister is going to get the surprise of his life.

Percy looked at the eleven-year-old's strange smile in confusion. He glanced at his watch and saw that he needed to be back in the courtroom for the beginning of the trial. Moving away from Courtney he opened the door and motioned for someone to come in. A woman with bright orange hair appeared in the doorway. The Minister scowled and the woman looked rather sheepish before her hair changed color into a more natural looking brown. Courtney's eyebrows shot up, that was a talent she had not seen before.

After Minister Weasley left the room, the woman strode over to Courtney and stuck out her hand. "Wotcher Courtney, the name is Tonks. I'm an Auror and Percy says to keep you company."

Courtney raised an eyebrow at the woman's excessive perkiness (she was easily older than her father), but extended her hand to shake anyway. Tonks sat down in a chair across from Courtney and said in a conversational tone, "So I hear you've been giving the Minister some trouble."

Courtney shrugged, her guard suddenly up again.

Tonks evidently caught her slight stiffening and laughed, "Oh, don't worry, I have not been sent to pick you for information or anything, I was just trying to make some conversation."

Courtney relaxed slightly and said, "I don't care for him."

"Who? The minister?" Courtney nodded. "Neither do I myself, however, he is my boss. What kind of a man presses charges against three of his own brothers when the laws themselves are the most ridiculous I've ever heard of. But will Percy listen to reason? 'Course not. When it comes to protecting himself, Percy's as bad as Fudge." Tonks blinked rapidly and then said, "I probably should not have just said all that to you."

Courtney laughed. "So you don't like the laws restricting information about the war?"

Tonks shook her head firmly.

“So why don’t you do something about it?” Courtney asked.

“I’ve been trying for the six years I have been a member of the Wizengamot. I’ve tried every single year to get those laws repealed, but no matter how much support I seem to get at the beginning, for one reason or another it ends up being scrapped.”

“You are a member of the Wizengamot? Are you going to be in today’s trial?”

“Nah, I have to recuse myself because Sirius is my cousin. Of course, for some reason the same law doesn’t apply to Percy.” The woman rolled her eyes.

Courtney looked at her in amazement, “Yet you are an Auror? And you have sworn to uphold these laws and the justice system when there doesn’t seem to be any justice or fairness in the system?”

Tonks shrugged, “I was an Auror during the war and I stayed in the corps after. It is the way things are.”

Courtney rubbed her head at the headache she felt coming on. She was about to tear into this woman about the dangers of complacency, when the door opened and they were told it was time for Courtney to come into the court room.

Minutes later Courtney was seated with a few other people to the side of the room, while the accused sat in the middle of the room with everyone looking down at them. Unsurprisingly, Albus Dumbledore looked completely unruffled. One of the Weasley twins appeared to be sleeping, but everyone else looked incredibly nervous. Sirius was brooding, anxiously running his fingers through his hair. Ron and Hermione seemed to be arguing quietly. The other Weasley twin was studying the floor in great detail. Courtney looked around the room. The Wizengamot were assembling on the tiers to her right and to her left, near the entrance to the courtroom were seated family members and friends of the accused. She could see Professor Snape among

them as well as a number of Weasley family members. She assumed that Professor McGonagall had been required to remain at the school.

A pounding gavel quieted everyone and brought their attention to the Minister.

“Investigational hearing of the ninth of January,” said Percy as a woman with a quill to the right started scratching away, “into multiple breaches of the Information and Security Act of 2006 by Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Ronald Bilius Weasley, Hermione Granger Weasley, Frederick Christopher Weasley, George Malcolm Weasley, and Sirius Archimedes Black.

“Interrogators, Percy Ignatius Weasley Minister of Magic; Susan Tiffany Bones Head of Magical Law Enforcement; Draco Lucius Malfoy representative of the Ministry Intelligence Regulation Council; and Maynard Proctor representative of the International Confederation of Wizards. Court Scribe Marietta Edgecombe Smith.

“Witness for the defense...” Percy trailed off, looking at the accused.

Professor Dumbledore spoke, “We require no other witnesses, we will be our own witnesses.”

Percy cleared his throat uncomfortably at Dumbledore’s unfaltering gaze and said, briskly, “Very well then. We will get started.”

“Albus Dumbledore, are you aware of the content of the Intelligence and Secrecy Act of 2006?”

“Yes.”

“Are you aware of the function of the Ministry Intelligence Regulation Council?”

“Yes.”

“Did you know that Miss Courtney Barnes was going to share restricted information with the audience on January fifth of this year?”

“Yes.”

“And you still allowed her to commence her oral presentation?” Broke in Draco Malfoy.

“Yes.”

“So, you knowingly allowed restricted information to be disseminated to a large number of people?” Percy said, disdain evident in his voice.

“Yes.”

Draco Malfoy’s face held an ugly smirk as he once again interrupted, this time turning to Courtney, “Miss Barnes, did any of these accused present you with restricted information?”

Courtney looked at him for a moment and then answered, smirking, “Could you please tell me what information is restricted so I know which information they provided me with that they should not have?”

Snickers were heard throughout the congregated Wizengamot as Draco scowled deeply.

“Miss Barnes, did any of these accused in any way give you information on Harry Potter that you did not find in the library?” Percy said after sending a glare towards the sniggering members.

Courtney carefully thought about her answer, “They did provide me with information outside of what I could find in the library, but not information I did not already know.”

Draco, who had looked just about ready to crow at her admission, erupted in anger saying, “Who then fed you that information?”

Courtney didn’t have a chance to answer as Percy seemed eager to interrupt and stop her from proclaiming that her source was Harry himself. “It does not matter where the information originally came from. The fact of the matter is that these persons did knowingly allow her to present restricted information. Nor did they report that someone had leaked that restricted information to her in the first

place which is in violation of Addendum B of the Information and Security Act."

Draco scowled when Percy interrupted him, he really wanted to know who had the information it seemed Courtney had been about to say in her presentation. No matter, he would find out later and would take care of that person quietly. He could not afford that information getting out. He would let these fools here hang the accused with their own rope and then take care of the little mudblood. The old fool Dumbledore wasn't even making an argument for himself, practically insuring his own fate and those with him, for it seemed they were following his lead. Draco looked at the six defendants. That mudblood wife of Weasley seemed to know Dumbledore's game, for she looked perfectly content with his words, whereas the rest of the group seemed to be looking at each other nervously as the Headmaster made no move to defend himself or his actions. Not even a self-righteous Gryffindor explanation that he was doing the "right" thing. For a moment Draco was worried that this would not remain the case because it was too easy, but he brushed the thought aside as he saw Hermione even beginning to get uncomfortable as Percy continued his questioning.

"How long have you known that Miss Barnes was in possession of restricted information?"

Albus had to think for a moment and replied, "That would be since Halloween."

"So you knew she had top secret Ministry information for two months and did not disclose this to the proper authorities?"

"Correct." Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling madly, which confused the Minister to the point that he thought that the old man might have finally gone senile. Deciding that that must be the case he addressed Sirius Black instead.

"Sirius Black, at what point did you find out that Miss Barnes had restricted information?"

Sirius licked his lips nervously and answered, "I have known since mid-September."

Draco almost snorted. It would figure that Black thought himself above any laws regarding the information about Harry Potter.

"And why did you not inform the proper authorities?"

Black's face took on a recalcitrant expression that would have looked more in place on a teenager, "I didn't want to. Courtney came by that information by perfectly legal means and I wanted to support her in her endeavor to find the truth. I even provided her with copies of the Daily Prophet that were pertinent." He ended defiantly.

Draco almost laughed with delight. This was just getting better and better. Percy's expression turned ugly at Sirius' pronouncement and he said in a hissing voice, "And you have no remorse, no shame for your flagrant disregard of the law in this matter?"

Sirius quieted for a moment, contemplating the question and then answered in a firm tone, "My only shame is that I did not break those stupid laws sixteen years ago. They are the most blatant manifestation of the spinelessness that seems to be rampant in our society," his tone was biting now, "None of us deserve what Harry did for us when he defeated Voldemort, least of all me, but I'll be damned if I let his memory be desecrated anymore by the likes of Ministry cowards who willingly place themselves in the pockets of wealthy, but even more cowardly, Death Eaters."

There were gasps around the room as Percy's face burned brightly red and Draco's face cooled to a pasty white. Draco vowed to repay Sirius for his words at another time, but for now he relished in the thought that nothing could save these idiots now from their foolishness.

"Minister," Draco said calmly, "I believe we have heard enough and can pass judgment."

It took Percy a moment to register Draco's words, but when he did he turned to the other two interrogators and asked them if there was

anything they would like to ask. They both declined and Percy turned back to the six people seated before him, now feeling perfectly justified in the judgment he was about to make.

Amelia watched as David looked apprehensively down the stairs. It was obvious that he was still unsure about this entire affair. However, as she watched she saw a determined expression take its place on his face. Whatever it was, it was obvious that he had just made a decision. He squared his shoulders and marched down the stairwell leading to the doors of Courtroom Ten, Amelia following a short distance behind.

Two Aurors (a man and a woman) stood at the door, guarding from intruders. They seemed to be gossiping to each other until they noticed David and came to attention. They were all silent for a moment and then David spoke.

“Excuse me, I need to enter this courtroom.”

“I am sorry sir, no one is allowed in this room without the Minister’s explicit instructions,” the man said in a bored tone, as though he had already repeated this phrase multiple times.

David looked to the woman, who seemed to be content to let her partner send them away. He squinted at her for a moment and then his eyes widened in recognition, “Nymphadora Tonks?” he asked.

Immediately the woman scowled but nodded. “Do I know you?” she said looking at him closely.

The other Auror rolled his eyes, “Doesn’t matter, you two can catch up some other time, some other place. Now get out of this hallway before we all get in trouble.”

David’s expression grew cold, “I am sorry, allow me to introduce myself, David Barnes. My daughter is currently in custody of your Ministry and I intend to find out why you had the gall to use her as your witness and didn’t even feel it necessary to inform her parent?”

Tonks' eyebrows rose. She had been speaking with Courtney just minutes before and could see the resemblance between her and her father.

"I'm sorry, sir, you'll have to take this up with the Law Enforcement office at a later time. I cannot let you in here."

David frowned and looked at Tonks who seemed to be struggling within herself. He really does have a right to be there. She debated briefly before suddenly deciding to throw caution to the wind. Who cares what Percy says anyway? Tonks suddenly smiled brightly at David. "Of course you need to go in Mr. Barnes. Come right on in," and she opened the door for him before her partner even had a chance to realize what she had said. She then pushed him and Amelia hurriedly inside following them herself and closed the door behind her, whispering a quick locking charm to forestall whatever action her partner might take.

No one seemed to notice their entrance and it became obvious as to why when they heard the words issuing from Sirius. Tonks winced at his harsh (but true) words. Sirius seemed to simply be digging himself deeper and deeper into this mess.

David listened to Sirius' words with great satisfaction. They were words that needed to be said and at the moment he didn't even care that it was Sirius that was saying them. He watched with great amusement the reactions of Percy and Draco. He had been surprised when Amelia had told him that Draco Malfoy was involved, he had been sure that Draco would be incarcerated, but Amelia had explained briefly that there had never been concrete evidence.

Well, I can provide that. He thought, vindictive triumph rising within him. His gaze moved from the two flustered men and to the other members of the gathered Wizengamot. He was surprised to see two other people whom he knew were Death Eaters.

Judicial overhaul, my foot! He thought, not really caring that these people were stupid enough to not be able to catch Death Eaters and therefore let them roam free in their society, but caring a great deal about what they could do to his daughter's world.

He finally realized something. He had promised himself at the top of the stairs that he would do whatever it took to insure Courtney's continued safety and happiness, even if it meant revealing himself. He had desperately hoped it would not come to that, but he had known all along that it was a vain hope. What he realized though, was that he was going to have to do it all. He would have to make the first move to change things because Dumbledore and company were getting steamrolled.

It's always me. Why is it always me? He asked in desperation to whatever fates might be listening.

However the answer came from within himself. Because you are Harry Potter and it is what you do. And because it is for Courtney and Michael. David could not deny the truthfulness of that and he secretly wondered at the small part that had added an and yourself to the end.

With a start he realized that he had, for the first time in years, consciously thought of David Barnes and Harry Potter as the same person.

He snapped to attention as Percy loudly called for a vote of the assembled wizengamot to convict or acquit the sixpeople who had at least a grain of courage to finally defy the laws and try to change their society. Just as he had found he could not hate them for who they had been when he had first known them, he found he could not hate them while he knew they were doing this for his daughter. It should have been done a long time ago but he could be honest enough with himself at the moment to realize that he himself was not blameless in the entire affair. He had made it too easy for them to forget.

He finally grasped what he had told Courtney only a few days ago. He could not hide any longer who or what he was. The truth demanded to be released. Simply by being a wizard he had a responsibility to that society, just like being a human brought responsibility to anyone. He could not fully embrace the society, he knew that, but he would do everything in his power to make it into a society that he could tolerate for the sake of his family.

He listened as Percy proclaimed a majority (more like unanimous) ruling to convict. The Minister then said, "The laws set forth proscribe not standard punishment for an crime of this magnitude, therefore these criminals will be held in cells here at the Ministry until the High Council of the Wizengamot can determine a just punishment."

A just punishment? David snorted as he watched Aurors approach Hermione, Ron, Fred, George, Albus and Sirius and the wizengamot began filing out of the tiers.

It was time to act.

Sirius, despite his vocal strength, was actually quite terrified at the moment. Azkaban had influenced him in incalculable ways and he was now facing one thing he had not thought of before—being put back in Azkaban.

Intellectually, he knew the prison had changed immensely, as there were no longer dementors guarding it. However, that did nothing to calm the growing fear of being incarcerated again. Last night in the Ministry cell he had reasoned to himself that everything would be fine, he would leave that cell in the morning. Now however, his prospects of continued freedom seemed suddenly dimmed. The fear was quickly taking over his rational sense as he heard Percy's pronouncement on debating their punishment.

Albus seemed to be reading his thoughts for he placed a hand on Sirius' shoulder and murmured a few calming words. Sirius took a few deep breaths in an attempt to calm himself down and organize his thoughts. However he was interrupted by a sharp voice issuing from near the door.

Ron, Fred and George were huddled together in tense silence, none speaking, but silently supporting each other. They knew that this could turn out very badly. At the very least Fred and George would be fired from the Department of Mysteries. Ron's job was probably in equal peril, his team would not want a man convicted of revealing Ministry secrets. The youngest Weasley boy looked around at his wife and her two colleagues. Without a doubt all three would be fired from Hogwarts.

He wondered briefly at his own sanity for risking so much for that slip of an eleven year old, but he quickly realized that he was not doing this for Courtney, he was doing it for Harry. Ever since he had become a part of the plan to reveal the truth he had felt a burden lifted that he had not even known he carried. He no longer cared what the law said. That had simply been an excuse for sixteen years, a shield to hide behind. But he had broken the law and now his conscience lay exposed to the horror once again of what had happened to his best friend.

Ron shook his head in an effort to stop all the thoughts crowding in. He saw the Aurors approaching them and silently prepared himself for transport back to the Ministry holding cells. He thought again that this could really turn out badly. They could all be sent to prison for who knows how long. A jolt of fear went through him as it registered that both he and his wife would be punished equally—what would happen to their children. Intellectually, of course he knew that his parents or Hermione's parents or one of his siblings would gladly take care of them. But that was not the point they were his children. He deserved to be a part of their lives, not spend their best years in jail! If he had committed a serious crime, of course he would have to go to prison, but this? He was giving up his freedom for a law that made no sense?

Ron Weasley became angry and was about to reproach Percy, his brother, with this when someone else spoke up first.

David had had enough of this. It was time to act.

"You never cease to amaze me." He spoke loud enough to be heard over the movement and mutterings of all those congregated. "Time and time again, this government has proved itself filled with incompetent fools who are more interested in lining their own pockets and their own comfortable station than they are with the welfare of the people they supposedly serve. And all you people disgust me just as much, allowing them to lord their power over you and allowing corruption to spread like a plague because it does not affect you or because you actually benefit from kickbacks." He paused a moment and then said something that he knew would offend their proud

bearings, "You are less than any muggle people or government on this planet. At least in that world there is some semblance of a struggle against the decay of complacency that you allow yourselves to fester and rot in."

Dead silence followed his words as all eyes turned to him and he stepped forward so as to be more visible. He looked directly at Percy and said in the same tone, "Imagine my surprise this morning upon hearing that my daughter had been whisked away by the Ministry, without anyone bothering to tell me, her father."

Percy stared in confusion at the utter confidence and self-assured stance of the man before him. This man should not be here, much less acting like he were the authority, it was not in the proper order of things. He pushed that aside momentarily to answer his words then answered, blustering, "Mr. Barnes you must understand that the wizarding world works diff—"

"I must understand nothing. You have overstepped your boundaries one too many times."

Draco, who was still seething at the audacity this muggle had to deride them all right to their faces, stood, clenching his wand in anger and said in a loud voice, "Aurors, remove this man from the premises, his very presence is in violation of our laws. He is a muggle, unconnected with these proceedings. He has no right to be here."

Glinting eyes zeroed in on Draco and a low laugh erupted from the man and he said mockingly, "I have no right to be here? No Draco, you are the one who does not have a right to be here. You who should have been rotting in prison these past sixteen years. As slippery as a serpent, always. Cunning, of course. But proud to a fault." David Barnes then abruptly shifted his stance and suddenly power began radiating off of him as he barked out, "Aurors! Arrest Draco Malfoy."

Without even thinking three aurors responded to the power in his words as those around him looked at him in awe. The aura of magic became stronger as he almost seemed to glow, very few, if any, had ever seen such a manifestation of power. Only Albus Dumbledore at

his height and the Dark Lord had exhibited in this manner in living memory.

Sirius was perplexed as he sensed the magic this man carried. David Barnes was a muggle. He did not have magic. Courtney was a witch, her parents though were muggles. Her father had been completely repulsed by the idea of magic. Yet here he was radiating power that Sirius had not seen in years...a power that above all else was familiar. His gaze darkened as his mind grasped the identity of this man.

Albus quickly moved to support the fainting Sirius. Thoroughly enjoying the prospect though, he simply watched David—no Harry do his work. Draco Malfoy was now screaming out obscenities, demanding to be let go, but the aurors refused, compelled by a power they had no understanding of to perform this duty that had been asked of them. Movement to his right drew Albus' attention as he saw Courtney Barnes fighting her way through the crowd to get to her father.

David spoke in deliberately measured tones, bottling in the fury that was building, the wave of power he knew was coming “—Draco, you are the one who does not have a right to be here. You who should have been rotting in prison these past sixteen years. As slippery as a serpent, always. Cunning, of course. But proud to a fault.” He felt the dam break inside himself as the power he had buried for so many years came rushing up at the beckoning call of his emotions. He did not try to stop it. He allowed his magic to flow freely, though keeping a tight hold on it so it would not lash out. Yet.

As he snapped his orders to the Aurors he felt an undercurrent of a power he had never had before. It was a subtle but immensely strong affirmation to his commands. This power, whatever it was, was actually ensuring his orders were met. He realized with a jolt that this must be the power granted to him with Merlin's Staff. He looked to Albus and saw that he knew very well what powers were at work here. He saw the confusion in Sirius' eyes and finally the realization as he collapsed.

Something jolted his senses and he felt his powers suddenly changed in their flow. His own innate powers seemed to be attacking the

foreign powers of Merlin's Staff. In a flash of understanding he clamped down on his own powers and bent both his magic and the magic conferred upon him to his will. He ordered the new powers to become one with himself and become his own power.

Albus's heightened magical senses could discern the power struggle as it emerged. He stiffened, wondering if he should say anything, could he help at all? He relaxed though, as he sensed that Harry had resolved it with no trouble. He felt the subtle shift in the balance of the room, as though everyone and everything in the room were now only important in the context of how they related to Harry, to that power he held. A vacuum of silence briefly overtook the room and suddenly a carved wooden staff appeared in Harry's hand.

The literal staff of Merlin. The final symbol that the power had been assumed and was now manifest once more in an individual.

David gripped the staff in surprise, but touching it brought answers to the questions in his mind. Impressions and memories held within the staff flowed into him, giving him greater understanding of what had just happened and what the future could bring.

He looked around to see if anyone else understood the implications of the staff. It seemed no one did. Then his eyes rested on Percy.

By the look of growing horror in his eyes he knew that Percy knew exactly what the significance of the staff was, and, by extension, who he was. However, he allowed his eyes to continue their travel over the room, where they finally settled on his daughter who had just broken through the throngs of people and was running towards him.

He turned to her and opened his arms as she grabbed him around the middle.

"I knew you'd come," she said breathlessly, excitement exuding from her entire being.

David gently kissed her on the forehead. That action brought his power up to a peak that no one had ever imagined. It reverberated around the room, and through their bodies. Ron, who still had not

figured out the truth felt it lift his burdens even further as it traveled through him. Draco felt it strike fear into his heart. Percy felt it as an utterly paralyzing sense of failure and doom. Around the room it affected each person in different ways. Unaware of what had just happened, David, keeping one arm around his daughter, turned to address Percy. "You will release those you have just convicted and then you will wait for me in your office. I will deal with you in two hours."

With that, David left the courtroom, one hand grasping the staff, his other arm around Courtney, with Amelia walking confidently beside her.

Post author notes: I haven't been able to fit this into the story anywhere but these are my thoughts on Harry/David's feelings about the wizarding world and why Kathryn's death was necessary. Think of Harry and the wizarding world as being on two different sides of a wall that Harry has built. He has been building the wall thicker and higher every year, distancing him from everything that it stood for and everything he was. Courtney's admittance to Hogwarts started to hack at the wall, leaving Harry desperately trying to figure out a way to both breach the wall for Courtney's sake and keep it fortified as he has been doing for years. He tries to do this by writing to Courtney as Harry without revealing himself. Slowly his wall is breaking down but he is not sure what he wants and is not sure to proceed with his relationship with Courtney either as Harry or as her father. Still, he can only go so far, he refuses completely to go to Hogwarts he is not ready for that his wall is still much to big to take that step.

Now, in my mind if Kathryn had simply been hurt David would have become so angry that he would have brought Kathryn back, pulled Courtney out of Hogwarts and tried to forever distance himself from it and forget magic ever existed. An injury would have been like somebody lobbing cannons at his wall and he simply would have retreated and re-fortified what was still standing of his wall. His wall would have been stronger than ever and his attitude would have probably ended up destroying the life he had made for himself including his relationship with his wife and children. We would then have Harry miserable for the rest of his life.

Kathryn's death however, is not a cannon being thrown at his wall, it's a nuclear bomb completely obliterating it. Her death shatters everything that he has made his life into and everything he was keeping back. It forces him to confront what he has separated himself from for so long. With no wall between David and Harry he must either build up the wall piece by piece again, or else let it remain crumbled and clean up the debris.

Harry would never willingly break down that wall on his own; Kathryn's death was a catalyst that left him completely vulnerable, exposing his fears and emotions associated with the wizarding world and forcing him to deal with his past and find a future.

I hope that makes sense.

## Chapter 24

### A Matter of Arranging Affairs

Completely unaware of the drama that had just played out below them in Courtroom Ten, the rest of the Ministry personnel and visitors went about their own business. No one paid any attention to a man accompanied by two teenage girls, except, perhaps, to wonder why the girls were not in school.

No one stopped to watch as they exited the lift on the second level, approached a door labeled Magical Law Enforcement—Family Services Division and entered. David found himself in a rather small office that had only one occupant at the moment. An older woman with a kindly face looked up at their entrance and broke into a smile, “Amelia! How wonderful to see you.”

Amelia smiled a genuinely happy smile and said “Eileen, how are you doing?”

“Wonderful, dear. And you?”

“Great. Thank you for the Christmas gift.”

“Oh, you’re welcome. Now what brings you here at this time of year?”

“What are the exact terms of my status as a ward of Hogwarts? I mean, if I wanted someone else as a guardian?”

“Well, technically, you are a ward of the Headmaster of Hogwarts,” she opened a drawer as she spoke, “anyone can apply to be your guardian, but they have to be approved by both the Hogwarts Headmaster and our division. Your summer guardianships have always been pre-arranged with professors from the school so it has never been a problem.”

“What about permanent adoption, not just temporary guardianship?” David asked.

Eileen who had been flicking through some files, presumably finding Amelia's, stopped and looked up at David. "There are many different kinds of adoption in the wizarding world," she stated slowly, "and all of them are very complicated. As well, it would require the approval of Amelia's birth parents."

"What?" Amelia exclaimed in surprise, "What do they have to do with anything?"

Eileen sighed, "According to the wizarding world you are under the legal guardianship of the Headmaster of Hogwarts, however according to muggle law you are still under the guardianship of your parents. The system of setting you up with a temporary guardian every summer has avoided the problems of the muggle legal technicalities, but an adoption of any sort would require following muggle laws as well as wizarding laws. Since Hogwarts, its headmaster, and Professor Dumbledore all do not exist to the muggle world and you are most definitely recorded as existing in the muggle world we can't remove you from their records nor can we put on record that you are the ward of a nonexistent entities. So to the muggle world you are still under guardianship of the Dursleys."

Amelia wore a scowl on her face. She had thought that she would never have to deal with the Dursleys again, but it did make sense in a twisted way. Everything with her situation would appear normal to the muggles and normalcy was always her parents' number one goal. Still though, she did not want to have to deal with them.

"Amelia, the Dursleys would give me permission to adopt you, I have no doubt of that. Even if they are not too happy with it, Dudley wouldn't cross me. I want to adopt you and so I will do what is necessary. The only question is, are you sure you want this too?"

Eileen watched silently as the fourteen year old thought about it. Courtney, who remained silent standing near the door, was looking hopefully at Amelia. Finally Amelia let out a small sigh, "I want this David, I do want a family again."

David turned to Eileen, "I wish to adopt Amelia."

“Of course Amelia is of age to have a say in her guardianship, but this is highly irregular. I will need to speak with Headmaster Dumbledore and there are certain papers that must be filed, interviews conducted, background checks, and many other things.”

“As I said, I will do what is necessary. Amelia deserves a family and I can give her that. Albus won’t stand in my way, in fact I think he would be very happy by this turn of events.”

Eileen knew there was something bigger going on here but she doubted she would get the full story. So instead she decided to turn this one over to her superior.

“Well then, if you would like to answer a few questions right now we can get this started. Let me go find the director of our department so you can speak to him.” She stood from her desk and moved around them to go out the door. A few minutes later she returned with someone Harry recognized from his own Hogwarts days, Ernie McMillan.

“This is Ernie McMillan, director of Family Services. He can start you in the adoption process.” Eileen said briskly, suddenly glad to be turning this over to someone else, she had a feeling that this would get complicated.

Ernie nodded, grateful to have been pulled away from what he had been doing. When the Family Services division was slow (which it often was) he was often called upon to help in the Family Records Division, something he detested. So he quickly retrieved Amelia’s file from Eileen and took some additional files from another drawer. “Please, come with me. We’ll go to a meeting room to take care of this preliminary interview. How much time do you have?”

“About two hours, then I have a meeting with the Minister,” David answered as he and the two girls followed the former Hufflepuff to a nearby room with a table and a number of chairs. They all sat down and Ernie started scrounging around for the right parchment. He then took a quill out of a pocket and started filling it in with Amelia’s name and case number and file number. He then looked up at the other three occupants of the room.

“So, as I understand what Eileen told me, you want a formal adoption of Amelia Morgan Dursley?” he looked at David who nodded.

“Well, then first of all, I need your full name.”

“David Alan Barnes.”

“Date of birth?”

David hesitated a moment and then answered, “August 25th, 1980.” He decided that he would continue as David Barnes in his every day life. Harry Potter would re-emerge but only when he needed to wield that authority. Other than that he would keep the two separate, if not for his own sanity than for the protection of his children, which would soon include Amelia. He didn’t want them to deal with the media circus that would no doubt tackle Harry Potter with vigor. The less people who know the truth the better.

“Occupation?”

“Pediatric Oncologist.”

Ernie looked up in confusion at the unfamiliar words. David sighed, “I am a muggle doctor.”

“A muggle doctor? Are you a muggle? I have all the wrong forms here. It is highly unusual for a muggle to adopt a fully introduced member of the wizarding world. Of course it has happened with infant adoptions, but those are then handled by muggle family service divisions as it is not yet under our jurisdiction. How did you come to be here then sir?” Ernie started jabbering.

David sighed, wondering how much he would need to reveal. “Mr. McMillan, I am a wizard, but I live in the muggle world.”

Ernie’s expression turned suspicious, “The only reason I can think of for a wizard to live like a muggle is if he is hiding. Tell me, Mr. Barnes, have you ever been convicted of a crime?”

David felt like banging his head on the table.

ooOOoo

Percy had immediately dismissed the Wizengamot, much to the members' confusion, and released the accused. He retreated to his office and took a large gulp of headache potion. Then he sat back in his chair and looked at an empty glass case that stood beside one of the bookshelves in his office. Not so long ago it had not been empty. It had held the Staff of Merlin. When Harry had not shown up at the awarding ceremony (as expected) he had accepted it in his place and had kept it on display ever since.

He didn't fully understand the power that had coursed through that courtroom, but he knew for sure that it was unlikely that the staff would ever again be shown in that office during his lifetime.

David Barnes was Harry Potter.

Percy cringed as he remembered some of the things he had said to Courtney earlier; he knew Harry would eventually hear them. He would also eventually hear or read some of the more interesting things Percy had said about Harry Potter in the past.

Percy suddenly understood with great alacrity the meaning of the muggle phrase "digging your own grave." For a few more minutes he sat in contemplation before pulling out parchment and quill to draft a letter of resignation.

ooOOoo

Ernie noticed the frustrated look on David's face and frowned even deeper. This was not looking promising. "Mr. Barnes there are certain criteria that have to be met by adoptive parents. Full disclosure is pertinent to our concerns for Amelia. If you are not prepared for that then you are not prepared to adopt her. Now I ask again, have you ever been convicted of a crime?"

"You know," David said turning to Amelia, "this would be much easier if we just went through the muggle legal system. Then we could

bypass all of this. Going through Wizarding Family Services is going to make us do the same work twice.”

“Now see here, you can’t just do that!”

“Why not? Is it not true that if I adopted Amelia in the muggle world you would have to acknowledge it?”

“Well, yes,” Ernie grudgingly conceded, “but that is not the point! All we have in mind is what is best for Amelia. And short of a proof of a blood connection you can’t bypass these things.”

“Blood kin can bypass some things?” David asked interestedly.

“Of course,” Ernie snorted, “those types of adoptions are the easiest and most common. After the war there were plenty of family adoptions for the children most affected by losses.”

“Well then that will make things much easier. I am blood kin of Amelia. That is exactly why I want to adopt her.”

Ernie sat back in his chair and steepled his fingers, “I’m sure you are. If you are just here to waste my time, please leave. Amelia has only one magical relative as far as the family records division is concerned, I should know because I work down there often enough, and it is most certainly not David Barnes.”

David rolled his eyes. “Fine then Ernie, you want Harry Potter, you’ll get Harry Potter.” He then retrieved his wand and waved it over himself, revealing for the first time in about sixteen years, his true looks.

Ernie’s eyes were glued to the scar on his forehead and the famous green eyes, his jaw hanging open in surprise.

“Now you know exactly why this wizard has been living in the muggle world, and the fact that yes I have been convicted of murder, but that was overturned, and you also know that I am a relative of Amelia’s. So once again, I would like to adopt Amelia.”

ooOoo

Sirius opened his eyes groggily, unsure of where he was or why indeed he had been unconscious. He groaned and immediately felt someone put a cold cloth to his head.

“Easy Sirius,” murmured the voice.

Slowly his mind registered the voice as belonging to Albus and he managed to open his eyes. “Albus,” he spoke, voice slurred, “wha...happened...”

“Have a glass of water,” the headmaster held the cup to his lips and Sirius drank greedily. “Now what do you remember last?”

Sirius thought back and as the Headmaster looked on he knew that Sirius did remember what had happened. The younger man closed his eyes and breathed in deeply saying, in an almost detached voice, “I wondered, when he acted so strangely in my rooms when I spoke to him, I wondered where all the anger at me came from. I understand now, of course,” he opened his eyes, laughing humorlessly, “I’m just amazed he didn’t throw me out of his house when I showed up to tell Courtney about the wizarding world.”

Both men were silent for a moment and then Sirius stared at the Headmaster, “How did it come to this? It should never have gotten to the point where he would have to come back to do these things for us all over again. Haven’t we put enough responsibilities and burdens on his shoulders for a lifetime?”

Albus sighed and rubbed his head tiredly, “I don’t know Sirius, we really are a bunch of cowards, aren’t we.”

Sirius sat up and realized for the first time that he was in the Hogwarts infirmary. “So what happened with the trial?”

“All of us were released, pending legal review, according to Minister Weasley who, as Muggles say, has seen the writing on the wall. I really have no idea what Harry’s intentions towards us are. However, considering that now I do not have to worry about Draco Malfoy’s

ascension to Headmastership, I intend to retire at the end of the year.”

Sirius blinked. While the Headmaster did not hold the record for longest Headmaster, he did hold the record for longest years on staff. Given that most wizards and witches alive in the United Kingdom had been student to him either as a Transfiguration professor or Headmaster, it was hard to imagine him not at the school. He vaguely remembered that Albus had served an apprenticeship with a Hogwarts Transfiguration Master in the late 1800s as well and acted as a teaching assistant.

The Headmaster let out a small chuckle at Sirius’ silence. “I have been a part of Hogwarts continually in some capacity since 1918,” Albus paused for a moment and then added, “with the exception of those few months in 1993 of course.” 1

“It will be hard to imagine Hogwarts without you.”

“Yes, well, I suppose after a few months of boredom I shall miss it too,” the headmaster attempted to say in a light tone, but Sirius knew he really would miss the school dearly. “Now then, I suppose I should congregate the school and tell them that they won’t be losing their professors after all.”

ooOOoo

Silence filled the room for some minutes. The four Weasleys who had been released from the trial had congregated back at Hogwarts in the room off of the Great Hall. Hermione gazed into the fire, trying not to think where everything had gone so wrong. Unwelcomed memories pestered her—a passionate 14 year old determined to see justice for House-Elves, crusading in her years just after the war for werewolf rights. Where was that zeal and sense of right all these years with regards to Harry?

Fred and George seemed to be sharing a silent conversation and Ron was sitting alone in a corner farthest away from the others. Finally, after reviewing the scene from the courtroom a number of times, he sighed and walked over to his wife.

"Hermione, what happened in that courtroom? Why did Percy dismiss all the charges when Courtney's father came in? Muggles have no rights in a Wizengamot trial and Percy can't have known about Courtney's correspondence with Harry...what happened?"

Hermione looked at her husband and his two brothers warily—none of them had figured it out. "Don't you get it?" she said suddenly starting to laugh, "David Barnes isn't a muggle. Harry Potter didn't give one-third of a company to a random eleven year old muggleborn witch—he gave it to his daughter! Did you know," Hermione continued, her voice rising in pitch, "that Courtney Barnes, is a Parselmouth? Severus found that out. It was Harry that healed Albus after his heartattack—the reason he had it in the first place was because he figured out the truth about David Barnes and then tried to contact him breaking his oath." Tears were streaming down her face now as she broke into hysterical laughter. Ron, in shock could do nothing but stare. Fred finally cast a spell on Hermione to slow her breathing and she calmed down, though tears still leaked out of her eyes. In a softer voice she continued, "I figured it out just a few days ago. It was the only explanation that made any sense."

Ron sat down on the floor and reviewed the trial again, this time with the knowledge that David was Harry. He understood more about what had happened, but brought up many more, unanswerable, questions about what would happen in the future.

Fred thought back to the event that had brought David to Hogwarts in the first place—the death of Kathryn and cringed at the possible implications of Harry Potter's wife being the first ever recorded muggle death in Hogwarts castle. He felt a great need to speak to his wife, she had known both Kathryn and David better than he had.

George, not wanting to think about all the implications at the moment, instead, turned his mind to analyzing the power he had felt in that room. The Unspeakable in him wanted to find out more about how David had ordered the aurors to arrest Malfoy, what the limits of the power of Merlin's Staff were.

ooOOoo

After a full five minutes of silence Ernie managed a perfectly composed, "Right then. Family adoption forms."

"Ernie," Harry said, taking Ernie, who was still more flustered than he was trying to appear, by surprise and he actually dropped the quill to the floor. "Just...calm down, okay? We're not going to get anywhere if you are a nervous wreck. I want to adopt Amelia as David Barnes, not as Harry Potter. It is my legal identity in the Muggle world."

Ernie simply nodded.

"And I do want to do it all legally, following the laws. I may have the Staff of Merlin, but I will not place myself above the law. I may make a number of changes to the laws," a smirk worthy of a Slytherin in the house's heyday of power crossed his face, "but I will still be subject to them. Now why don't we continue where we left off?"

Ernie took a deep breath and said, "Right then, the Family Adoption Process is much easier than other types. However, the situation with the Dursley family does complicate things, you won't have any trouble with the Wizarding system, but the muggle system might have some questions as to why they are voluntarily relinquishing their rights as parents."

David nodded in understanding, but his mind was already following another line of thought, "What if the judge or lawyer handing the case in the muggle system were aware of the Magical world and could therefore help us with those difficulties?"

Ernie looked surprised, he had evidently never even considered going through muggles who knew about the wizarding world. "That would be brilliant," he paused for a moment and then said slowly, dredging up an old memory, "I think Orla Quirke's mother was a lawyer, she was a few years behind us at Hogwarts and I dated her briefly during the war. Even if she does not practice family law, she might know who we can get in contact with. According to Justin Finch-Fletchley many parents and family members of magical kids will get in contact with each other."

David nodded remembering that it had been Megan Weasley, a muggle spouse, who had contacted Kathryn to get to know her better and to show her more of the wizarding world. Of course the Dursleys raising him would never have been interested in meeting other people with magical family members, but he could certainly see how others might like to spend time with others with whom they could discuss the strange powers of their loved ones. Ernie picked up his quill again and commenced filling in the correct information on the adoption forms.

ooOoo

Forty-five minutes later David (once again disguised) with Courtney and Amelia in tow exited the Magical Law Enforcement level of the Ministry and ascended to the Atrium. From there he and the girls used the fireplaces to floo to Hogsmeade and then walked up to Hogwarts. It was nearing lunch time and David, grudgingly, had decided he needed Dumbledore's help. Or rather, Dumbledore was the only one he trusted in the remotest since of the word to carry out his request.

David sent the two girls to the Great Hall and then went directly to Dumbledore's office. He rolled his eyes as he realized that he did not know the password. Quickly naming off a few sweets to no avail he felt his dignity slowly crumbling. That is probably why Dumbledore does it, he thought to himself.

"Translation Twists," came a voice from behind him as Albus approached. David raised an eyebrow. "New candy from Weasley Wizard Wheezes. Please, come in."

David followed Albus up the stairs and entered the familiar office with startling feelings of nostalgia. The portraits regarded him briefly, a few voicing condolences, remembering he had been the one summoned a few days previously.

Had it really been only a few days?

"I am surprised to find you here, Ha...David," Dumbledore quickly corrected at a sharp look from. "I did not expect you to return to Hogwarts any time before evening, much less to come to my office."

David nodded, "It wasn't really my plan, but I have to face reality. A number of major changes need to be made in the wizarding world and I am not so arrogant as to think I have the wisdom to make all these decisions."

Dumbledore instinctively knew David was not asking him personally to help and so he asked, "And what would you like me to do?"

"I want a list of muggles with wizarding knowledge and every squib, I want those who have legal knowledge, whether they are lawyers, judges, legislators, magistrates or even accountants, like Arthur Weasley's cousin. I want a list of every name you can come up with that fits the bill. I want them from everywhere, all around the world. I also want full details on what the leaders of the various countries of the world know in regards to magic and a summary of the wizard-muggle relations of each country and a roster of all the leaders of the wizarding world."

"Of course," Dumbledore nodded, his mind already thinking out a few dozen names he knew, "And when would you like this?"

"Just...as soon as possible. I would appreciate it if you could give me a summary tonight of the United Kingdom and the rest later."

"I can give you a few names right now if you like," Dumbledore offered.

David considered him for a minute and then nodded. Dumbledore pulled out a piece of parchment and started writing as he spoke, "The British Muggle Prime Minister is, of course, fully aware of the Wizarding World. The Muggle Liaison office works with a sub-department of the Internal Affairs Ministry. That sub-department is simply called the Committee for Cooperation and is comprised fully of muggles with wizarding knowledge. They would probably know more than I do about others who can help. They used to keep a roster of families who had wizarding relatives. Ten years ago the Ministry of

Magic would send all muggle parents a pamphlet detailing where they could find more information about the wizarding world via muggle channels. I believe they stopped that, though I am not sure why." Albus paused a moment to think and then said, "Your greatest asset in this, I believe, is the one MP in the House of Commons who has wizarding knowledge. She is quite intelligent and not very easily intimidated at all. Though young, she has always had quite a bit to say about wizarding laws and customs." He jotted down what David supposed was her information, and then continued, "There are a number of people in legal professions that can help you. However, some of these people I am listing can be quite antagonistic towards wizards in general."

David quirked an eyebrow, he didn't see a problem with that, he was feeling pretty antagonistic towards the wizarding world himself.

"Percy Weasley has advocated an even more strict isolation policy that has been well received..."

Dumbledore continued on for some time until David interrupted him,

"Thank you for that, I will speak to you more this evening. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an appointment with the esteemed Minister of Magic." David rose to leave the room only to hear as he opened the door a soft question from Dumbledore.

"Why did you decide to," Dumbledore cringed at using the word trust because he knew full well David did not trust him, but it was the only word that would fit, "trust me with this assignment?"

David turned around fully and studied Albus for a minute. He sensed only an honest question, no manipulation. Dumbledore genuinely wondered this.

"Because you proved last night that you could tell the truth. You didn't have to tell me what you did. If you had not, I never would have known, but you did. I respect that honesty. Even if I still hate you, I can respect what you did. Do not prove that respect unfounded."

With that he turned and left the room.

ooOOoo

After speaking briefly with Amelia and Courtney, David returned to Hogsmeade and used the public floo to get back to the Ministry. He strode to the wand weighing station and presented his wand and then asked for directions to the Minister's office. He was told to go to Level one and present himself to the secretary. He did so and found himself ushered into the opulent offices of Minister Weasley.

Percy, he found, was seated and looking out his window. The Magical Maintenance department were currently showing a calm spring day as opposed to the real, cold, wet winter weather David had to look at through his window at the hospital. David stood there just looking at him for a moment and then said, "I always knew you were pompous in school, but I thought you had your heart in the right place. Attacking Ron the way you did after the Second Task of the Tri-Wizard Tournament...I thought there were things more important to you than your ambition." He left his words hanging in the air and waited for Percy to turn around.

When the minister did eventually turn his chair around he looked weary and David could see, at close range, that age had not been as kind to Percy as with most wizards.

Percy let out a sigh and rubbed his head, "What do you want me to say then? You're right? I'm a prick? Ok, you're right, I'm a prick."

David shook his head, "I want to know where the young man went who was honestly interested in civil service for the sake of helping people. During the war you were one of the strongest advocates for lawful capture of Death Eaters—it annoyed Voldemort a great deal because there were some Death Eaters who would turn themselves over to you because they knew you could be trusted to follow the law exactly. How could you let lies proliferate and appoint Draco Malfoy, of all people, to be in Ministry Intelligence? Have you become so blinded by your power now Percy?"

Once again Percy sighed, “I don’t know. I don’t know where I lost sight of ...everything. As for Malfoy, there has never been any proof....”

David started laughing, “You mean he just intimidated those who could have testified against him. I know for a fact that Blaise Zabini could have given you plenty of evidence against him, but I have no doubt that Blaise saw it more beneficial, given the current state of affairs in the Ministry, to keep his mouth shut.”

“How do you know...?”

David barely managed to keep from rolling his eyes, “My scar Percy, give me a Pensieve and I can give you plenty of evidence against Draco Malfoy, not to mention against Robert Davies and Julian Cromwell as well, both members of the Wizengamot, I noticed.”

Percy’s mouth dropped open.

“Given your track record so far, I would not be surprised to find even more former-Death Eaters free in society.”

Percy simply picked up a piece of parchment and handed it to David. The younger man took it and read it.

I, Percy Ignatius Weasley, do hereby resign my post as Minister of Magic, effective January 9, 2022...

“Well,” he said upon finishing, “at least you have some moral fiber in you. Congratulations, you are not as bad as Cornelius Fudge.”

“And what will your plans be for the future of the Wizarding World?” Percy asked softly.

“Well, there will certainly be some changes in the laws and in the government structure and I intend to do the same for other countries as well. Wizards and witches are endowed with powers that muggles can merely dream of, and yet you have become stagnant and complacent, letting your world decay from within. You don’t need Voldemort to destroy it for you, you’re well on your way to doing it

yourselves. But since my children, which will soon include Amelia Dursley, have chosen to be a part of the Wizarding World, it is my responsibility to ensure that it is worthy of them. I don't expect perfection—but is it too much to ask for people to make a stand? Even Voldemort had a stand, and he forced others to make a stand as well, but you just muddle along now.

“I do not intend to become once more a part of the wizarding world, too much has happened for me to want to. But I have realized that I have a responsibility to the Wizarding World, simply because I am a wizard. Muggles don't have the convenience of completely leaving their world if something bad happens and I should not have left you to your own devices,” he said this almost to himself, but then looked sharply at Percy, “But even though I will not be rejoining this society, I will oversee a number of changes. You have too much freedom, too much power, too little control and too little morality.”

Percy wasn't sure what his response should be to this tirade, and so after a pause, he said, “I have informed the press that I will hold a Press Conference in...an hour now. I intend to announce my resignation, what would you like me to say about the trial?”

David pursed his lips in thought and then said, with great reluctance, “Say what you will, but answer no questions, announce your resignation and then announce Harry Potter.”

ooOOoo

Members of the Press, including some international wizarding media, were congregated in the Atrium of the United Kingdom Ministry of Magic. They were waiting rather impatiently for the Minister to show so they could find out the verdict of the Hogwarts Trial (as it was being called). Various stations on the WWN had taken up the whole morning broadcasting debates between various legal experts or ministry officials. If David had listened to any of them he would have laughed at the sheer absurdity of how they completely danced around the topic—never actually naming taboo subjects, but still managing to sound like they were all for free speech or on the side of Dumbledore.

When the Minister stepped up to the podium relative silence stole over the crowd as they all looked to him expectantly. After casting a sonorous charm, Percy spoke.

“Due to some...unusual circumstances, the trial of Albus Dumbledore, Ronald, Hermione, Fred, and George Weasley, and Sirius Black has been ended without rendering a verdict. All charges have been dropped pursuant to re-examination of our legal system and some laws.”

Murmurs broke out all across the gathered witches and wizards, and many raised their voices in questions.

“Minister! What brought about this change in...”

“Which laws will be re-exam...”

“How will the legal system...”

“Percy, why this sudden change in policies regarding...”

Percy ignored them all and raised his voice slightly to drown out theirs and say his next piece, “And, effective immediately, I resign my post as Minister of Magic.”

An even greater outcry came as a response but Percy still did not acknowledge them. “And here, today,” his voice almost cracked, “to answer a few questions about the changes in the works, is Harry James Potter.”

Total silence met this proclamation.

1 This is of course referring to his temporary removal in CoS.

## Chapter 25

### Making Changes

Harry (undisguised) stood near the back of the press crowd. He wore his old Invisibility cloak that he had quickly gone back to Hogwarts to borrow from Courtney. Looking over the crowd he was glad to see no sign of Rita Skeeter, and not very surprised to see Colin Creevey wielding a camera and quill. As the impatient reporters shouted out their questions he wondered, not for the first time, why he had thought it would be a good idea to attend a press conference.

If you want something done, you've got to do it yourself. The old adage ran mockingly through his head as Percy came to the point in his speech where he announced Harry. The man in question smirked at the effect those words had on the crowd.

Then, after a minute, he removed the cloak.

ooOOoo

After the initial shocked silence, the first thing all the reporters did was look around quickly for the infamous Man-Who-Disappeared. When they did not see him immediately they turned back to the Minister of Magic expectantly. There was a moment of eager anticipation and then a gasp was heard at the back of the crowd. As one, they all turned to the source and saw Harry Potter moving through the crowd. They parted for him to pass through, some in awe, some in fear.

Finally standing before them at the podium he took a deep breath and started speaking.

ooOOoo

Molly Weasley had refused to go to the Wizengamot trial. She knew she would not have been able to handle seeing four members of her family put on trial by a fifth member. So instead, she had started cleaning the attic—something she had been meaning to do for months. When, after a few hours she had not heard anything she

gave in to the temptation to turn the WWN on. Nursing a cup of juice she waved her wand at the receiver and sat down to listen to the news.

“...In regards to today’s trial, all charges against the accused have been dismissed. The laws that they broke should never have been made in the first place. Hiding from the past can only do harm—it must be dealt with.”

Mrs. Weasley wrinkled her brow. She didn’t quite recognize the voice of the speaker, but the words themselves were surprising. What had made Percy change his mind?

“Expect some major changes in the coming months. With the powers that have been granted to me I will implement a number of changes. The details have not been worked out yet, but the broad goals will be to ensure that it is impossible for an innocent to be sent to prison, to ensure justice is served for the remaining Death Eaters and their victims, to give more rights to muggles involved in the Wizarding world...this is of course an incomplete list of goals, but it will give you an idea of what is coming. Keep in mind that I will not only be reviewing this Ministry and its laws, but the laws all over the world governing wizarding bodies.”

Molly traced her finger around the rim of her cup, listening closely, trying to understand what was going on. It sounded as though Percy was not Minister, but of course that was ridiculous—elections weren’t for another two years.

“The wizarding world has been left to its own devices for far too long, your society is crumbling at its foundation and so I will be building a new foundation for you.

“I will be calling another press conference in a few days to give a clearer idea of what will be done. The Ministry of Magic will, for the next few days, still be under the guidance of Percy Weasley who will be taking care of the ordinary duties of the Minister. Any larger decisions will be forwarded to me by him.

“Lastly, I expect that I will be receiving a lot of mail, please address any mail to the Hogsmeade Owl Office. There will be those there designated to bring me what is important and discard that which is not. Any owls delivered directly to me will be returned unopened and without acknowledgement.”

There was some silence on the WWN and then the announcer’s voice came on, “If you just tuned in to this station let me get you up to speed on what has happened. This morning’s highly controversial trial regarding confidential war intelligence being shared in a public setting was ended without a verdict. The defendants were released. In a press conference just minutes ago Percy Weasley resigned as Minister of Magic and,” the announcer’s voice shook, “Harry Potter addressed us from the podium.”

Molly Weasley’s cup shattered.

ooOOoo

All in all, the Press conference had not gone that badly. Of course, the reporters had been a little stunned at first but by the end they had all been shouting questions. Harry pointedly ignored them and walked away, disappearing under the invisibility cloak once again—much to the disappointment of the crowd. He disguised himself once again and headed back to Hogwarts. It was late in the afternoon when he entered the school again and approached Dumbledore’s office. He knocked on the door and stuck his head in when invited, “I’ll be taking Amelia and Courtney with me now for the rest of the evening.”

That was when he noticed Minerva in the room, looking a little put out at him just telling the headmaster this rather than asking. Dumbledore however, just nodded and said, “Thank you for telling me,” there was a slight pause and the old man looked hard at David, “Amelia?” He questioned, remembering seeing the Slytherin with him earlier.

David nodded, “I am adopting her.”

A smile crossed Albus’ face, “Fantastic.”

David started to close the door but Dumbledore's voice stopped him, "Oh, Mr. Barnes—here is the ... uh...telephone number of the MP I told you about. She is the one you should contact to get in touch with the Ministry committee that acts as liaisons with this world."

David stepped into the room and took the parchment piece. He stuffed it in his pocket and left to find Amelia and Courtney.

"Well, we have a little time to waste before dinner at your grandmother's Courtney, what would you ladies like to do?" David said as the three of them walked to Hogsmeade. "I have some calls and other arrangements to make, but I can do those from my mobile."

Courtney shrugged and looked to Amelia. The older girl thought for a moment and then said, "Actually could you just show me your...our home?"

David found it difficult to breath for a moment. The house...still with all of Kathryn's things. He had yet to return there. Both girls noticed how he seemed to have frozen. Courtney said "Dad?" worriedly. David shook himself, "It's nothing."

In Hogsmeade they flooed to the public floo closest to the Barnes home. David realized with some amusement that they would have to walk from the subway station back to the house, but it was not that far to walk. Entering the quiet empty house, Courtney immediately started showing Amelia around while David once again had to calm the raging emotions. Everything was just as he had left it when Fred had given him the horrible news. There was still food out on the counter that he had left when the knock came on the door....

David shoved his hand in his pocket and pulled out the parchment that Dumbledore had given him. He quickly dialed the number and was rewarded with an almost immediate answer, "This is Paulina."

David, startled, did not know exactly who he was supposed to talk to—he had simply dialed the number without looking at the name. He glanced down at the name. In Dumbledore's spidery handwriting was written Paulina Granger.

“Ms. Granger,” he said with surprise, “I’m sorry I did not expect you to answer.”

There was a pause, “Who is this, and how did you get this number?”

“Sorry,” he said hastily, “My name is David Barnes; I was given this number by Albus Dumbledore.”

“Oh!” There was a pause and then Paulina said, “well then David, what can I do for you?”

“I understand that you are a key member of the Committee for Cooperation.”

Paulina snorted, “Well, yes I am a key member, but everything we do is pretty much one-sided. The Wizarding World isn’t known for its cooperation with ‘lesser beings.’”

“How would you like to help me change that?”

“What do you mean?”

“Could I meet with your committee sometime soon?”

ooOOoo

Paulina Granger hung up her phone somewhat confused, but also curious. She looked at the caller identification on her phone and then went online to look up this David Barnes.

Apparently he was a rather famous doctor. Rumors said he was very wealthy. According to the local paper his wife had died just days before in a tragic accident.

Well then, what did he have to do with the Wizarding world? She shrugged to herself, she would find out tomorrow when he met with her committee. And, it wasn’t like it was always obvious how someone was connected to the wizarding world. There was an elderly gentleman on the committee who only found out about magic when his son and his wife had been killed in a car accident leaving him with

their three grandchildren—all of whom were magical. Paulina couldn't imagine having to suddenly just believe that magic existed.

She had always known about magic. Hermione had been sixteen when she was born and, though she had never been close to her sister, she had always known about Hermione's abilities. It had actually been some of her discussions with her sister that had gotten her into muggle-wizard relations after her political career had started. Hermione of course would never admit it, but everyone in the wizarding world, the great Professor Granger included, had egos in desperate need of deflating. She had thought, naively, that she would be able to affect changes, but had realized that such changes would have to start within the wizarding world and had lost much of her spark in the fight.

She wondered what this Barnes fellow thought he could do.

ooOOoo

After David had made a few more phone calls, including speaking with the hospital and getting a longer leave of absence, he called Kathryn's parents' house and told them they would be over soon for dinner. That done, he gathered the girls into the car and drove to the Taylor home, where Michael stood waiting in the yard for them.

David scooped up his son and proceeded to ask him about his day, just as he always had done when he got home to his children.

“Gramma an’ me looked at pictures of Mommy.” Michael said with a solemn face.

“And did you like that?” David asked, his heart constricting painfully.

Michael nodded, “Gramma cried. I saw Mommy when she was little. She played in the dirt.”

David laughed slightly and entered the house where the wonderful smells of dinner assaulted him.

ooOOoo

As David helped Rachel clear up the dishes he asked her how Michael had behaved that day. Rachel smiled at him, "He really was quite good today. But..." a small confused look passed over her face, "he was saying some of the strangest things."

David withheld a sigh and said, "Such as?"

"Well, he said that he had seen Courtney turn a matchstick into a needle."

This time David let the sigh out. "Rachel, there is something I need to tell you and Jackson about."

She looked at him shrewdly and David winced at how the expression seemed so familiar—he knew his wife had gotten that expression from her mother. She nodded sharply and quickly finished up the cleaning.

They all gathered in the living room, Michael falling asleep in David's lap, and David started speaking softly, "Rachel, Jackson, you know how I have hidden my past for a long time." They both nodded. "Well, part of what I had kept hidden was the fact that I am..." he paused for a moment, to gather the courage to actually declare it, "I am a wizard," he said in a rush.

His in-laws blinked. "A what?" Jackson asked.

"A wizard. With magic. Michael is a wizard too, Courtney and Amelia are both witches. The school Courtney goes to is a school for magic. That is where we have been living since Kathryn.... That is where it happened," he said almost inaudibly.

"The wizarding world was the past I was hiding from myself and from everyone else." He looked at the two of them, trying to understand. They both were looking at him as though he was insane. He pulled out his wand and conjured a flower and handed it to Rachel. Her mouth opened in surprise and awe. Jackson, on the other hand, passed out.

ooOoo

Explanations had taken a few more hours and it was late by the time the four of them returned to Hogwarts. After sending Amelia and Courtney to their respective dorms and putting Michael in his bed, David tiredly ascended to Dumbledore's office. It had been a very busy, trying day and tomorrow didn't look like it would be any easier.

A short knock brought an invitation and David entered to find Dumbledore alone in the office. The younger man wondered at the stamina of the Headmaster—he had to be at least 170 years old by now.

“I,” David halted to yawn, covering his mouth, and then continued, “I need to go to sleep. I have a meeting tomorrow morning with the Cooperation Committee, but shall we meet tomorrow afternoon?”

Albus simply nodded and David trudged out of the office and to his rooms, collapsing on his bed, without even undressing, and falling fast asleep.

ooOoo

Surprisingly, David awoke refreshed bright and early. He arose and scrunched up his face at the state of his clothing. He washed quickly and dressed in the same clothes (which had been cleaned by the house-elves while he was showering), and went into the main room of the suite. He found Michael already awake and chatting with a small creature.

He looked incredulously at the flopping ears, “Dobby?” he breathed, not quite believing it. The small creature turned around and regarded the man curiously, “Is sir knowing Dobby?”

“Uh...”

“This is my Daddy Dobby!” Michael said bouncing on the balls of his feet, “He is the bestest Daddy in the world!”

“Dobby is pleased to meet sir!” the house-elf bowed. David was still staring at him. Finally he said slowly, “Do you still work at Hogwarts?”

“Yes sir, I is hired by the Headmaster sir.”

“Would you like to work for me?”

“Sir wants Dobby to work for him?”

David took out his wand and reverted back to Harry.

“Yes, Dobby, I do.”

Dobby burst into tears, “Oh! Oh! Sir is Harry Potter! Harry Potter asks Dobby to work for him! Dobby is not worthy!”

“What do you mean, not worthy?”

“Dobby could do nothing for sir when he was accused!”

Harry’s face took on a stunned look, “What do you mean?”

“Dobby tried to go to Azkaban and help Harry Potter, but Dementors,” Dobby shivered, “Dementors,” he whispered, “have bad effect on house-elves.”

“You believed me?”

“Of course Harry Potter! Dobby knew you sir! Dobby knew you!”

Tears were suddenly streaming down Harry’s face and he said, “Dobby, I would love for you to come work for me.”

ooOOoo

The Committee for Cooperation met in conference room in the Portcullis House. The Committee wasn’t so much made up of government officials as ‘concerned citizens.’ They had a rather large database of people who had magical connections, and while most of them would get together periodically with others who knew of the

wizarding world, there were less than two dozen interested in meeting to discuss political aims in muggle-wizarding relations.

Paulina looked around and noticed that most of the people she had called had been able to make it. She had notified the Prime Minister that they were meeting; he always liked to know what was going on in the wizarding world and often liked other perspectives than the official communications from the Minister of Magic who had become more and more taciturn in recent years. Right on time, the door swung open to reveal a thin man with brown hair and brown eyes. She recognized him from his photo on the hospital's website.

She stood and greeted him, "Dr. Barnes, I am Paulina Granger."

He shook her hand and looked at her closely, then declared, "You look absolutely nothing like your sister."

Paulina raised an eyebrow, "You know Hermione?" 1

David nodded without explaining and looked around the room at the others gathered. To his surprise, Megan Weasley was there. His mind drifted back to what Dumbledore had told him....

"How are you doing David?" she asked bringing him out of his thoughts.

"Better, thank you. How are you doing?" He had just realized that this woman had been the one to see Kathryn die.

She mustered a shaky smile. David then looked to Paulina. She sat back down and gestured for him to go ahead with what he wanted to do.

"I am assuming you are all here because you have an interest in muggle-wizard relations or at least your status in relation to your magical friends and relatives."

There were brief nods.

“My name is David Barnes and my daughter started Hogwarts this year. A few days ago, my wife, a muggle, died in an accident at Hogwarts. And the Ministry of Magic had the audacity to, without even asking, take my eleven year old daughter who was still grieving for her mother to court to testify in a trial.”

Murmurs ran through the room. “Are you speaking of the Hogwarts trial?” One man asked, “The one having something to do with restricted information?”

David nodded, “I am. When I went to the Ministry and was told because I was a muggle I had no rights, it made me realize some changes needed to be made.”

“And what do you propose we do then?” a woman asked scornfully, “We’ve been trying for years to get them to listen to us.”

Paulina spoke up in agreement, “The only way it will ever happen is for someone in the wizarding world to propose some changes.”

“Which is exactly what I intend to do,” David said smoothly, “I am a wizard, I just have been living outside of the wizarding world for eighteen years. I turned my back on them and never looked back until my daughter started Hogwarts.”

“I doubt they will listen to a wizard who has denied his heritage for almost two decades,” Paulina said, “I know you have good intentions, but...”

David held up a hand, “I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t have a way of accomplishing this. I want to know what changes you think are necessary and why. And I will see to implementing them.”

“How?” one elderly man said.

David took out his wand and waved it over himself, “I am the be-all, end-all in wizarding law, not just for the UK, but for the entire world. I am Harry Potter.”

Paulina, who had been balancing her chair on the back two legs, fell backwards. She had heard rumors about this man, but whenever she had asked her sister about him, the older girl had clammed right up. Some others in the room showed signs of knowing who he was, but it was obvious that a few did not understand the implications.

“Because of my acts in the last war, I was awarded the distinction known as Merlin’s Staff. I am the ultimate governing official of all wizards and witches. What I say is law. Period.”

“But, what good is that? How do you expect to enforce your laws?” One man asked.

Harry grinned, “It is not just a title, it is a magical endowment of power. Anyone who has taken an oath whether it be as Minister of Magic or other government positions, or among the Aurors, is compelled to follow my commands. Refusal breaks their sworn oaths to uphold the law. The power of Merlin’s Staff ensures my will is done. Now what changes do all of you see as necessary?”

ooOOoo

The meeting had taken a long time and near the end the Prime Minister himself had come in and he and David had ended up meeting alone for an hour afterwards. David had lots of notes and lots of suggestions. Some were probably not usable at this time, but others were more solid—good enough to start building on to give the results he needed. He only hoped the meeting with Dumbledore would be as productive.

When he entered Dumbledore’s office again however Percy Weasley was sitting there with Dumbledore. Percy shot to his feet when he saw David, looking almost comical. David raised an eyebrow at him. “Ah, Malfoy’s lawyers are protesting his arrest without charges and holding him without bail and a number of other numerous charges.”

David blinked. He had actually forgotten about Draco Malfoy. David nodded shortly though and said, “I will come tomorrow and give an affidavit.” He then turned his attention to Dumbledore who retrieved a scroll of parchment and handed it to David. He opened it and perused

its contents it was a concise summary of wizarding muggle relations in the UK—much of the information was redundant with his earlier meeting, but there were some pertinent points Albus had included as reasons and motivations for certain actions—things which had never been explained to the Muggles. The list of names included had a number of people he had met that morning.

“I just met with the Committee for Cooperation and the Prime Minister,” David said, “They presented a number of ideas to me, but this helps as well. Now, both of you, explain to me what has been done to change the legal system since I left.”

After a lengthy explanation and even more notes Harry then asked the most pertinent question to him, “Now, please tell me why in Merlin’s name you thought it would be a good idea to hide the truth about me, about what happened?”

There was silence for a long time, but David didn’t make it any easier on them by breaking it. Finally it was Percy who spoke in a defeated voice, “It was easier to continue as we were.”

David eyed him shrewdly and then looked to Dumbledore, waiting for him to answer. “As I told Courtney not long ago—we wizards are a selfish lot. Despite abilities that would astonish any muggle we are far more narrow-minded than they are. Perhaps in earlier centuries, where we struggled to survive, it was appropriate, but we don’t have those same problems, yet we still apply the same patterns of behavior. Change is slow in the wizarding world, probably as a result of our extended lives and our longstanding traditions.”

Silence reigned once again and finally Dumbledore sighed. “I know these answers are not acceptable, because the attitude is unacceptable, but they are the truth.”

“I know,” David finally said then he stood to go ready himself for dinner.

“If I may ask...” Dumbledore said hesitantly. David gestured for him to continue, “Your intentions towards the Ministry are clear, but what changes will you be making at Hogwarts?”

David thought for a moment and then gave an answer that surprised the other two men a great deal, "Nothing for the moment. I have my hands full with the government, I can't think about Hogwarts right now. As you have recently proven yourself a slight bit more competent than the average wizard at making decisions that are good ones, I'm not going to make any changes."

A small frown crossed Dumbledore's face and he replied, "You should know then, that I intend to retire at the end of the school year."

David nodded, not really surprised for some reason, "Still, I don't need to worry about that now." With that he left.

As he walked back to his chambers though he thought more about Dumbledore's question—there had been a subtext of what are your intentions towards your former friends to the question, and David had yet to figure out the answer to that.

ooOOoo

The next morning various reporters were gathered at the Ministry because it had been rumored that Harry Potter was to come to give evidence against Draco Malfoy. There was another rumor circulating that he would also be exposing some other Death Eaters. When David Barnes entered the Atrium the reporters barely spared him a glance to make sure he was not Harry Potter. He smirked to himself—this was the perfect illustration of the complete idiocy of most members of the wizarding world. They had to see something to believe it despite the fact that they could conjure items out of thin air. He didn't look like Harry Potter, so he wasn't Harry Potter, never mind the fact that there were multiple potions and spells that could disguise a person. However, since it was working in his favor at this time he didn't begrudge it.

A few of the reporters saw David Barnes enter an empty elevator, but since none of the press were allowed into the Magical Law Enforcement department, none of them saw Harry Potter leaving the elevator. A young office aid spotted him and promptly dropped all the

files he was carrying and started scrambling around on hands and knees gathering them all again while hastily welcoming Harry.

Harry raised an eyebrow and wondered why the young man had not used his wand to pick up the items. When he had managed to get a hold once more of all his things, the young man led Harry back to an office.

The placard on the door read Octavius Rockwell III, Esq. Ministry Attorney. Harry entered to find four people in the room. The one behind the desk he assumed was Octavius. Draco Malfoy sat in one chair with a wizard on each side who Harry assumed were his lawyers.

“I understand you need my testimony?” Harry said languidly was Draco paled dramatically upon seeing him.

Harry took a seat, without waiting for an invitation, and launched into the tale of the night he was framed. It was not too long of a story, but he told them every detail he could remember. Then he provided his memory of it to Octavius who secured it from tampering so it could be admissible in court.

“There are other crimes I am aware of but I am unsure that my testimony would be admissible. I was witness to many of the things he did under Voldemort’s,” they flinched, they still flinched at the name, “command. But, as I was seeing things through Voldemort’s,” there it was again! “eyes in visions, it may not be admissible.”

“True Mr. Potter,” Octavius said in agreement. Harry had to hand it to him, he was handling all of this remarkably well, despite the fact that he winced at the Dark Lord’s name too. “However, I do know a number of people who have been keeping silent on what they know. I understand that Severus Snape was exonerated for past crimes,” Octavius nodded, “Did anyone ask for his testimony?”

The silence that filled the room was answer enough. Harry just sighed. Every time he spoke with anyone in the wizarding world his list of world’s stupidest decisions grew longer.

“Why not?” he asked.

Octavius fidgeted now under Harry’s scrutiny and finally mumbled, “His word wasn’t trusted.”

ooOOoo

David left the Ministry as soon as possible after setting a few things straight and returned to Hogwarts where Dumbledore informed him that he had called a school wide assembly to tell them the truth about Harry Potter. He had asked Courtney to say a few words regarding her correspondence with him because rumors had spread but would do most of the talking himself.

David did not attend the assembly but instead started pouring over his notes and drafting out more concrete ideas about what was going to change. It took him hours and he didn’t even realize how much time had passed until a knock came at the door.

He called for whoever it was to come in and was surprised to see Hermione standing very nervously in the doorway. Unsure as to what purpose had brought her here he set down his pen and looked at her closely. “The Headmaster has invited you to dine in the Great Hall tonight,” she said very quickly, not meeting his eyes, and turned to leave.

“Hermione,” he called half a moment later, “please meet me in the room off the Great Hall after dinner, bring Sirius, Ron and Dumbledore.”

If anything her nervousness increased. She just nodded though and left quickly.

David did eat in the Great Hall but declined an invitation to the head table and instead ate with Michael (who had been left to the care of Dobby most of the day) and Amelia at the Slytherin table. Courtney looked well enough at the Gryffindor table with her friends surrounding her.

Dessert was cleared up all too quickly though and David was trying to work up the courage to go through with the meeting with his former friends. Oh well, they were, he knew, at least as anxious as he was.

He strode into the room as students exited the Great Hall by the main doors. Minutes later he was joined by those he had asked to come. He looked at each one of them piercingly and then said, "I really don't know what to do about you. I already told Albus that for now Hogwarts will remain as it is, but the only reason I said that was because you didn't try to stop Courtney when she learned the truth and you stood up for her against the Ministry. You four," David's voice shook somewhat, "were the ones who hurt me most. I will never be able to fully trust you again. Albus has managed to gain back some of my trust, but even so, I will not rely on you as I used to. I don't want association with you but a certain amount will be necessary. What I want from you is to treat our relationship as you would any other parent of your student. We are acquaintances only, not friends. We are perhaps allies in the changes that I am instituting, but not comrades. Please do not push these boundaries.

"I will not be rejoining the wizarding world—I will remain on the fringes only, I have no interest in controlling everything. I will be setting the changes in motion and overseeing things, but the majority of the work will have to be done by witches and wizards who want to keep their world alive. I don't know what your views are or will be on the future effects of my actions. However, I don't want your support if it is only for me that you are doing it. Don't follow out of some misguided apology to me. It is far too late for that and would be absolutely meaningless. Even if your actions are genuine, do not look for a better reconciliation, it won't happen."

The four of them nodded, tears running down Hermione's face, the others a study in solemnity. Sufficiently convinced that his message had gotten through to them he turned to leave.

"David," Sirius said hesitantly. The man looked at him raising an eyebrow. "There is something you should know. We are of course, all guilty of betraying you, but..." he paused wondering if it was wise to even bring this up, but he was a Gryffindor and so he plunged on, "Ron is perhaps less so."

Interested now in what Sirius was trying to say, despite the fact that he didn't really think it could be true, David glanced at Ron who looked rather confused.

Albus spoke up next, "The first words out of Ron's mouth after he woke up in the infirmary were to ask who had been impersonating you. He refused to believe me when I told him what had supposedly happened."

David narrowed his eyes, "At the trial..."

"He had to say what he saw. But he only ever said that it was someone who looked like you. He never declared in the trial it was you," Hermione said softly.

David tried to think back to that day so long ago. The details were difficult to recall. He decided to look up the court scribe's record of that trial when he got a chance. He motioned for them to continue.

"It was months later that I finally managed to convince Ron that you were guilty," Sirius admitted, not looking at Harry. "Prior to that he had been found trying to teach Dobby how to conjure a Patronus to break you out of Azkaban," this came out as a whisper.

David stood frozen as he processed this information. Things were suddenly shifting again. He tried to think this through, but logic was failing him at the moment. He would have to deal with this slowly.

"Don't," Ron's voice ripped from his throat, "don't do this!" he was looking at the others in horror, "Just...don't. I'm just as guilty...I can't..." he trailed off and fled the room abruptly.

David looked at the other three closely, he could see their shame and grief in their eyes, but he also saw determination in them. He didn't exactly know what they were determined to do, but he sincerely hoped they would not be looking to find redemption because it would be a fruitless search. David was finally, once and for all, closing the book to his past and looking to the future-one that did not really include them.

Well, if they were not already convinced, then it would be a lesson they learned over time. He left the room.

ooOooo

1 Paulina Granger is of course Hermione's sister. JKR has indicated that she originally conceived that Hermione had a younger sister, but that the character never made it into the books. The name comes from Shakespeare's Winter's Tale—which is where JKR got Hermione's name. I just decided to continue the tradition.

## Epilogue: Reconciliations

The changes in the wizarding world took years to implement. The review process, even with extensive help from muggles and wizards alike was thorough and exhausting. Harry Potter had everything gone through with a fine-tooth comb. Some places he changed a great many things, some places he changed only a few. Muggle rights in wizarding courts were affirmed, laws for trials were stricter, more aimed at finding the truth and serving justice than even muggle measures. Too many changes were made to name them all, but it caused much commotion among those entrenched in their ways.

There were always witches and wizards protesting new laws or measures, but with the power of Merlin's Staff backing up the laws they could not change the tide and had to learn how to deal with it. In the first year alone after his reemergence there were three assassination attempts on Harry's life. However, there were five Death Eaters brought to justice which Harry counted as a success, despite the opposing views.

When new generations came along and grew up with the measures it became suddenly a lot easier to deal with. Amusingly, many of the younger generations looked at their elders like they were utterly insane when they learned about some of the old laws and practices.

Ultimately closer ties with muggles were asserted. The wizarding world was still hidden of course, but they were allied with their respective countries and both sides benefited greatly from it.

On the grand scale, the world had changed because of one man's actions.

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Dobby became an immense help to the Barnes family as he kept all of David's scheduling coordinated (he continued working at the hospital but had biweekly meetings to keep tabs on things), sort and answer his mail, and became very good at dissecting various bits of information to tell David what was most important. He also took care of Michael while David worked, though David made sure he was a

more competent guardian than he had attempted to be when Harry was a teenager.

Amelia's family eagerly gave up their parental rights to David, all the while grumbling about freaks, who couldn't do things the right way when they first indicated they wanted nothing to do with her, and she was quickly integrated into their family. David's actions and changes had gotten her interested in government and so after graduating from Hogwarts entered the Muggle relations department, which was a far cry from what it had been not long past. Muggle Relations was now considered one of the most difficult departments to succeed in, but those in control of the department were those who worked more directly with Harry Potter than anyone else.

Courtney went to a muggle university after graduating from Hogwarts and received her medical degree and then completed an apprenticeship at St. Mungo's. Following in her father's footsteps she became accomplished at combining magical and muggle healing techniques to achieve results not possible with either discipline alone. Her ground-breaking work established Combination Healing as a valid field, rather than the dabbling her father had done.

Michael was accepted into Hogwarts when he was eleven years old and placed in Hufflepuff, which Harry thought suited him. He barely remembered his mother, which Harry found immensely sad recollecting what his life had been like having no memory of his parents so Harry provided him with a Pensieve to put his own memories of her into and ask others for memories as well. This allowed him to see his mother all over again, whenever he wanted, something Harry had wished someone had been wise enough to do for him.

Albus Dumbledore, did indeed retire from Hogwarts at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, but lived to the ripe old age of 210. By the time he died Harry was able to regard him with some fondness again. Albus had had the wisdom to make a completely new relationship with Harry rather than trying to build on the crumbled and broken remains of what had been there before.

Harry eventually confirmed all that had been said about Ron and decided to give his old friend a second chance as he often found himself quite lonely. He could never be comfortable with Hermione, but he and Ron, through decades of work, had a stronger friendship than they had ever had while they attended Hogwarts. Hermione meanwhile, did manage to push past what had happened and became a crusader in her own right for different causes—some diametrically opposed to Harry's measures, some right in line with them. More importantly, she gained a stronger relationship with her younger sister.

Harry had little to do with Sirius at all. There had been too much to overcome. However, when Sirius died at 115, Harry attended the funeral and grieved for what should have been in their relationship.

Harry himself, despite all declarations to the contrary, eventually rejoined the wizarding world, but as a private citizen rather than ultimate leader. He had run into the problem all wizards in the muggle world found—slowed aging. He found himself nearly 90 years old and looking only 60 that and finally conceded he could not continue to live as David Barnes in the muggle world. That was when he found himself most grateful for Ron's friendship; without his co-workers, acquaintances, and friends in the muggle world, he was more alone than ever. The truth was eventually revealed to the wizarding public, that Courtney Barnes' father (who many remembered for his audacious disruption of a Wizengamot trial) was actually Harry Potter. By that time though all his children were grown and able to handle whatever came as a result of that. He never remarried, though he did date occasionally.

When Harry Potter died at the age of 173 he was mourned, not for his reputation, but for his accomplishments. He was one of the most loved and respected figures in the wizarding world and was put into textbooks alongside such great figures as Merlin, the founders of Hogwarts, and others—but he was counted greatest of them all. In a final letter to the wizarding world a few days before he died, surrounded by his children and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, he said this:

To Whom it May Concern:

I am Harry Potter, the wizard you betrayed, but it has taken me a long time to realize that I was a traitor too. By hiding, by running, I betrayed my parents and my heritage as well as the future. Thank Merlin I finally saw the truth. This world is larger than me, it is larger than you, it is more than just the present it is the past and future as well.

Pardon me for sounding didactic, but I am 173 years old so I can take certain privileges. Running, hiding, hate, bitterness—none of them are worth the energy and time expended. I prefer to face things head on now. Believe it or not, I forgive you. All of you. I did a long time ago in fact. There were some things that could not be brushed away, but I no longer hated you for them.

Take care of this world. Be vigilant. Be active. I beg you, don't let all that you have accomplished be in vain. Learn from the past, remember your mistakes. But create your future as well, don't just let the future come—meet it. I must be getting sentimental in my old age, that almost sounded wise, if a bit corny.

As my final act I place with you a trust. Upon my death the rights of Merlin's Staff will be abolished. I declare it: so it is. No one should have that much power. If you continue in the way you have been, there should never be any reason for such a position to exist.

Be well my friends, remember yourselves.

Harry James Potter